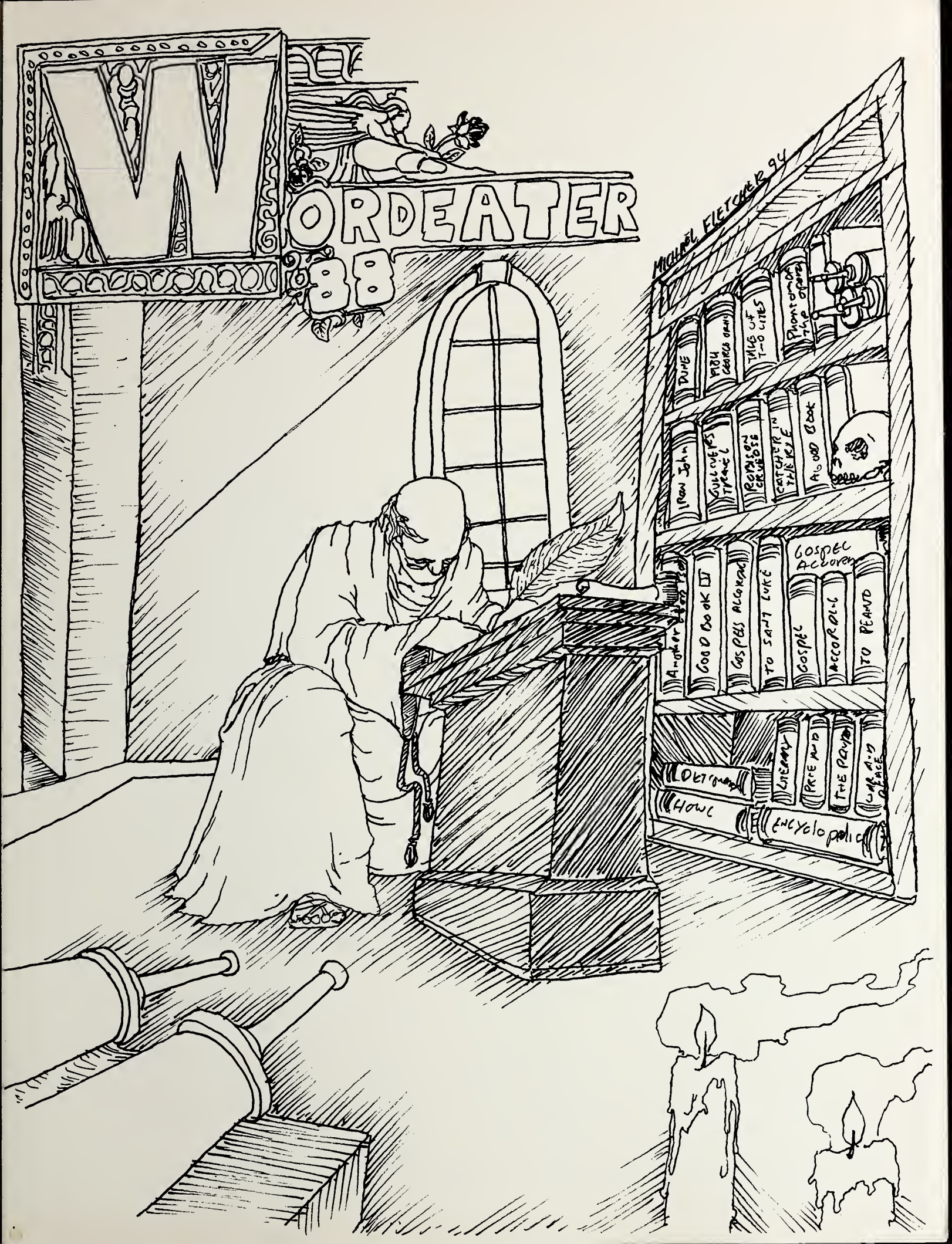
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Ode to the Time You Waste During Your Life Doing Stupid Things

Robb Barrett

bY ThE tIMe
YOu FiNiSh
ReADinG THiS pOeM
yOu WiLL bE AbOUt
7 SeCONds oLder.

wasTE oF 7 sEcoNDS, eh?

Tell me more...

Joseph Chellino

tell me more
about your boats
that don't sink
and look away
cram me full
of rocks and
hold me to
the bottom

The Garden

Janine Passehl

flowers grow,
intertwine
with weeds -
seeds of doubt
flourish
in my mind

To Sit...

Angela Brooks

to sit in the white room
staring into distinct depths
night and day
despondent in pinpoint vision
time melts and metes
passing but every second is visible
and far off in the corner the shadows rise in un-immaculate conception.

Evolution Assassinated Lincoln

Joseph Burza

There's a stickman Lincoln in the smallest of creatures;
A simple honesty that goes unnoticed -
Unnoticed because it cannot be seen nor grasped, but understood -
Understood only by those who do not possess it.
Those that do, will never know they have,
And that is the reason it exists.

A Peach Colored Wall...

Lorraine Johnson

A peach colored wall
surrounding me
on all sides
I am going crazy
at the spectacle of sight,
of sight and of color that is slowly
blinding me,
drawing me deeper into trance,
a trance of three dimensional splashes of
vivid color
that drowns my eyes,
until finally
all is black

I Will Follow

Steve Cutter

Wherever you shall go
I will follow.
No matter tiresome journey;
I'll flatten mountains and forge the sea,
I'll master storms and come to be
The one that you can trust.

And if, my love, you hide your heart
Deep inside yourself - never to show,
I'll travel through your wants and needs
And in passing, make them grow
Silent.
I'll traverse the valleys of despair I've dug
And bridge them over time.
Yes, in my travels I will find that heart
And hold it close and dear.
Then caress the wants,
Address the fears,
And grow throughout the passing years
To meet you once again.

Spirits

Caryn Kehlet

Spirits,
silence,
in some
unknown
universe.
Awaken me
the dream has
passed.
Now I know
nothing.

The Bearer...

Keleigh Biggins

the fly
lands upon my wrist
delivers his foul message
and continues on.

Captain...

Mike Oliveri

Captain Patrick MacNamara drifted through the bridge of the starship Journeyman much like his forefather, Captain Michael MacNamara, had nearly two hundred years earlier. While a number of other families had attempted to take the conn periodically throughout the ship's history, the MacNamara lineage had always proven to be the most able leaders.

In the viewscreen before him, a small blue planet grew larger and larger as Journeyman moved into orbit around it. Frayed white clouds swirled through the atmosphere, here and there revealing patches of green and brown continents. The second planet in the Salvation Star System, it orbited the star at a distance of 98 million miles, or just over one astronomical unit, and was thought to be capable of supporting human life.

"We've pulled into orbit, sir," the helmsman reported. A few more minutes passed, then "Your orders, sir?"

Mac bit his lip and considered. "Drop a remote."

"Aye, sir." The science officer complied, and a metallic object streaked into view at the bottom portion of the viewscreen. It glowed momentarily as it breached the atmosphere, then disappeared into the clouds. "We should be getting results momentarily."

Before long, the remote had landed, collected data, and begun transmitting results. "Sir, the atmosphere is composed largely of oxygen and air pressure is a little thinner than we're breathing now. There is no trace of toxic chemicals in the air or on the surface, and there is a fair amount of humidity."

"In short?"

"Salvation II is capable of supporting life."

The bridge crew shouted for joy, and a few of them even cried. MacNamara ordered the image of the planet be broadcast throughout the ship, then picked up the PA microphone. "Ladies and gentlemen, I am happy to announce that Journeyman's mission has achieved completion after two hundred and ten years and roughly ten generations of families."

The population of the ship cried out as one, their cheers echoing throughout the corridors and reverberating along the metallic walls. Tears of joy streaked their faces as they hugged one another and beheld the lovely jewel filling their viewscreens.

"We're going to run a few more tests before we begin to land anyone, but we are very confident that Salvation will prove to be worthy of its name. That is all." Mac replaced the mike and turned to his science officer. "What's the gravity?"

"Two-thirds gravity."

"Morrison, is that going to be a problem?"

Dave Morrison, the ship's Chief Medical Officer, scratched his chin. "Well, if everybody kept up with their gravity exercises, no. Of course, it will take some adjustment at first. But in the long run , we should be fine."

"Can we get a visual from the remote?"

"Yes sir, we can." The image of the planet was replaced by a mass of long golden poles filling the screen. Bundles grew out of their centers, each tipped by stringy fibers."

"Those are corn stalks!" somebody commented.

"They can't be!"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive! I've done a lot of work in the ship's gardens, and I damn well know a corstalk when I see one."

The bridge was abruptly filled with a mass of incoherent questions simultaneously directed at Mac.

"All right, calm down everyone," Mac ordered. Morrison stepped up beside him. "Mac, do you think there's life down there?"

"I suppose it's possible. We.... My God." Mac's jaw dropped as a pair of pale white hands appeared and separated a few stalks of corn. A lovely human face appeared a moment later, framed by long, flaxen hair. Two men came into view behind the girl, all three looking at the remote. They spoke together momentarily, then turned and departed.

"Looks like somebody beat us to the punch, eh Mac?"

"Great. Guess it's time for this Captain to put on his diplomat's hat and meet the natives. Stark, prep the Ares lander and put together a crew. Minimal complement, handguns only. Dave, I want you to come with me."

"I was afraid you were going to say that," Dave muttered.

***

The lander was buffeted as it entered the planet's atmosphere, and the passengers began to feel the pull of gravity on their bodies. Just below them, clouds streaked by in a white blur.

Mac flipped the intercom switch near his right hand.

"Circle around to the area where the remote landed," he ordered Commander Esparza, their pilot.

"Aye, sir," the intercom crackled.

Mac winced as he felt the craft lean to one side. The sensation was new to him and more than a little upsetting. His stomach began to churn, and somebody behind him threw up.

Before long the craft leveled out, and they felt it dip as they dropped below the clouds. Suddenly, the intercom crackled to life once more. "Captain, what appear to be two fighter craft have taken positions off our wings."

"Do they appear hostile?"

"No, sir. They're not responding to radio calls, but one of the pilots is waving at me. I think he wants us to follow him."

"Do it."

"Aye, sir."Again, the cabin rocked to one side as the lander turned to follow the lead fighter. Fortunately, everyone managed to keep control of their stomachs this time.

Minutes passed and Mac began to wonder what was happening. Finally, Esparza again broke the silence.

"Captain, we're approaching what appears to be a small city. There is a large airfield directly in our flightpath. Should I move to land?"

"See what the fighters do, then use your judgement."

Mac felt the lander change course slightly, then begin to descend rapidly. The craft shuddered when the wheels touched down on the runway, causing Mac to flinch in fear. Dave whispered an urgent prayer in the seat beside him.

Finally they rolled to a stop, and the pilot appeared in the doorway between cabins. "Not a bad landing for a pilot with only simulator training and zero-gravity shipbay landings, eh?" he said proudly. "Couldn't have done much better with my eyes open!"

"You had your eyes closed?" Dave asked angrily.

"Hey, relax, Doc! Just kidding!"

"You should be used to that Esparza humor by now, Dave," Mac remarked as he unbuckled his safety harness.

"I'll give him something to laugh about," Dave mumbled. "A boot in his ass ought to be damn funny."

The group got to their feet and bounced their knees a few times to test the gravity. "This ain't so bad," Security Officer Kincaid stated. "Pretty close to the grav trainers on board the ship." He jumped and bounced his head off the ceiling. "Ow! Maybe just a little less powerful." The others laughed as he rubbed his scalp. "Just take this gravity into consideration if we get into a fight, guys."

"All right everyone. Enough fooling around. Let's go meet the natives." Mac allowed the airlock to reach a neutral pressure, then opened the first door and stepped inside. The others lined up behind him. He struck a semi-dramatic pose before opening the outer door. A ramp descended from the craft's fuselage to the landing strip.

A few hundred yards away, they could see a pair of ATV's racing toward them. Mac began to walk down the ramp, careful to keep his hand away from the century-old .45 caliber pistol at his hip. He hoped the others were doing the same.

The ATV 's halted at the same instant Mac's foot hit the tarmac. Men in one-piece black uniforms and full-faced helmets emerged from each, stretching into a thin line before the vehicles. They held compact, threatening rifles across their chests, and knives were visible in their boots. The last man to step out appeared to be an officer as he wore dark gray fatigues and heavy black boots. A gunbelt was strapped low on his hip, and a combat dagger hung vertically, blade upward, over his left breast. Metallic skulls adorned the front of his cap and his collar. He approached Mac casually, arms swinging at his sides.

The pair sized one another up for awhile, then the other man spoke in a foreign language. His tone implied that he was asking a question.

"Do you speak English?" Mac asked hesitantly.

"Of course! English is the predominant trade tongue across twelve solar systems!"

Mac reeled. "Twelve solar systems?!"

The officer studied Mac's uniform more closely. It was a standard blue jumper with the American flag sewn on the left shoulder, NASA emblems on the left breast, and the wearer's name on the right breast. "Oh, no wonder you're so surprised. That uniform puts you in space at around...2000?"

"2004. How'd you know?"

"Looks like you boys have a lot of briefing coming. Come on, I'll take you to somebody who is a little more familiar with this sort of thing."

The officer led Mac and the others toward the ATV. Kincaid's hand came to rest near the grip of his pistol."Captain," he whispered. "I don't like the looks of this."

"Relax, Kincaid. If he were going to kill us, these goons would have done it already."

"Quite right," the officer stated, startling Mac and Kincaid. "We have no intention of harming you or your crew. In fact, you could say we have been expecting you."

* * *

The figure across the desk extended his hand toward Mac, who squinted his eyes against the bright reflection coming off the mass of medals adorning the man's breast. His uniform was predominantly black, decorated with gold and red piping. A silver braid was wound around his left shoulder, and a black beret decorated with a silver skull sat on the desk. An ornate sword and scabbard, its pommel shaped like a skull, dangled from the man's left hip, and a pistol hung from the man's right hip.

Mac hesitantly grasped his hand.

"Welcome to Salvation, Captain...?" the man asked in a deep, commanding voice. His white eyebrows rose high over his friendly blue eyes.

"MacNamara. Of the generation starship Journeyman."

"Ah! Another Irishman! We're few and far between out here amongst the stars. I should've known by that red hair. Mine was a nice shade of red once," he said, running a hand through his short white hair. "But age caught up with me. Name's O'Neill, by the way. You can just call me Jimmy."

Mac thought it strange that a man dripping with medals and carrying a weapon at either hip could be so open and friendly. "My friends call me Mac. By the way, where's my crew?"

"Enjoying a good meal in the commissary. You hungry? I could have some sent up here." O'Neill reached for the phone.

"No, that's all right."

O'Neill shrugged and sank back into his chair. "Suit yourself." He paused for a moment, then, "I suppose you're wondering what's going on around here, eh? Like, how I know English, what I'm doing here?"

Mac nodded.

"Well, let me start by saying that we've been waiting for you. Your ship's called Journeyman, right?"

"That's correct."

"Okay. In a nutshell, your ship was the first of the generation ships - we call 'em `breeder boats' these days - to leave the Earth in 2004. Your top speed was about one-fourth the speed of light, correct?"

"Right. How do you know all this?"

"Every kid learns the beginnings of the space program in school. I wrote a thesis on your ship, as a matter of fact. Yours was one of five ships commissioned by NASA in 1998 as a part of the Outreach Plan to colonize new worlds discovered by the Wallace Telescope in 1996."

"Geez. Sounds like you know more about it than I do."

"You know what they say: `hind sight is always 20/20'."

"If you're part of an Earth colony, then how'd you get out here? I mean, cryogenic freeze ships wouldn't be any faster than mine."

"We do. FTL drives."

"FTL?"

"Faster than light. Warp drives. That sort of thing."

"Jesus!" Mac exclaimed. "I thought that kind of thing was only theoretical."

"No sir. Doctor Marcus Yeager developed a drive that could do 1.05 times the speed of light in 2089. Powered by fusion coupled with superconductors. Went ballistic on its second test run. But the drive technology got better and was perfected by 2104. Ship that colonized this place was launched in 2108 at twice the speed of light. Landed in 2133, and the ships have been getting faster ever since."

"So this colony has been here for-"

"Eighty-one years. Hell, I was born here myself!" O'Neill grinned. "Mom and Dad planted the first crop in that cornfield you dropped your little toy in. My grandchildren were pretty upset when they saw it land."

"Sorry. I didn't expect anything to be down here. But if you left Earth so long ago, why didn't you pass us up?"

"You don't know a whole lot about astrogation, do you?"

"Just enough to steer around an asteroid belt or dust nebula. The course was planted in the ship before it was launched."

"Well, you understand that everything in the galaxy - the universe too, for that matter - is in constant motion?"

Mac shrugged. "Sure."

"Well, the course you took was based on the position of this planet a little over two hundred after its sighted position. Conversely, our course was based on its position about twenty-five years after our launch. So, in truth, we were aiming at two different points in space. The planet just moved into that

position at the same time we did. Furthermore, the Earth was also in a different position when you launched than when we took off years later. So our courses were dramatically different."

"I see," Mac nodded. "I suppose we have a lot of catching up to do, don't we?"

O'Neill laughed. "I don't think you'll ever catch up, my boy. You've missed out in a big way."

Mac leaned back, stretched across the back of the chair, and rubbed his face. He sighed as he sat up. "Christ." His eye fell upon the skull on O'Neill's beret. "What's with all the morbid uniforms, anyway?"

"What? Oh, the skulls and the macabre color schemes. That came from the Stellar Guard back in '61. 2161, that is. Added a little fear into the enemy. Gave a slight morale edge to the troops. It just stuck. Especially with the war and all."

"War?" Mac asked, alarmed.

"Yeah, Aliens. Call themselves `Shreks' in their own language. There was no literal English translation, but we've taken to calling them Sharks because of their big teeth and jaws. Ugly bastards. Totally bald humanoids with huge black eyes, no noses, and short tails. Skin color varies from pale white to a dark gray although a few black ones have been spotted. Their society appears to be based on some type of fanatical religion. They're very warlike. We never could figure out why they attacked in the first place."

"Who's winning?" Mac asked, more than a little worried.

"Who knows? The first attacks were in 2188. Ever since, both sides have been gaining and losing just about equally. We usually count casualties in planets rather than lives." O'Neill smiled. "Anyway. I've got some pressing business that needs my attention. My men will take you to your crew and see to your needs." He pressed a button set into a panel on his desk. Seconds later, the door opened and a large man dressed in black entered the room.

Mac stood. "What are we supposed to do?"

O'Neill spread his arms and shrugged. "I guess that's up to you and your crew. You're welcome to stay here if you like. You're the third breeder boat to arrive at its destination to find the planet already settled. The first crew stripped their ship and mingled into the population. The second found their planet overrun by Shreks and was destroyed. No survivors."

Mac nodded. "Let me talk to my crew and the families aboard ship."

"I figured you might want to do that. We've refueled your lander and prepped it for liftoff. There's a runway cleared for your disposal."

"Thank you, sir."

* * *

The soldier led Mac to a large conference room where his men were waiting. Kincaid had stripped his .45 and spread the parts out before him and now started to put it back together.

Dave had rocked back in his chair with his feet up on the table, idly picking at his fingernails.

Esparza was poking about at a cluster of unidentifiable objects on a table and dropped a small cylindrical item when Mac entered. It shattered on impact, and the pieces scattered across the floor. "Oops," he muttered in embarrassment.

Winston, Matthews, and Baker, who had been conversing in a corner, looked over and chuckled. When they spotted Mac, they moved to the table and sat down.

Mac took a seat at the head of the table with Dave at his left. Esparza gave up attempting to collect the pieces of the ruined device and swept them under the table with his boot. He then leaned against the wall and crossed his arms.

"Well," Mac said, lacing his fingers and resting his elbows on the table. "Any news?"

"I talked to one of the pilots out on the strip," Esparaza commented. "I struck up a conversation while they refueled our lander. He said it was a primitive toy compared to the stuff they've got today. He let me poke around in one of their ships and I had trouble recognizing it as an engine, much less identifying various parts."

Mac nodded. "Anyone else?"

"Yeah," Kincaid completed assembling his weapon and cycled it, then dry-fired it and placed it in its holster. "I was talking to a few of the men wandering the halls, and I found out why they didn't attempt contact with our ship. Apparently, the radio frequencies we use are obsolete. They've got some kind of new frequency band, much clearer than radio waves. It's sort of a super-enhanced cellular network boosted with specialized equipment. Even their weapons are like nothing I've ever seen. They call 'em plasma projectors. They throw superheated projectiles which explode on impact. They explained the specs to me and from the sound of it, they'd blow holes in the ballistic vests of a Twentieth Century. Make our .45's look like BB

guns."

"Well, I just had a long conversation with a gentleman by the name of O'Neill. He filled them in on a few interesting details of his conversation with O'Neill. When he finished, he asked, "Any thoughts?"

"We've failed," Baker offered. She ran a slender hand through her brown hair, cut short in the standard spacer's style. Long enough for style or fashion and short enough to stay out of the eyes in zero gravity.

"How do you mean?" Dave asked.

"I mean our mission. The Journeyman was supposed to settle `brave new worlds' and `pioneer the way for humanity' and all that drek."

Esparza laughed. "Failed? We made it! We're here!"

"That mission was for humanity," Dave added, "not just Journeyman. Nor was it just for the other four ships commissioned with it."

Officer Matthews cleared his throat.

"You have something to add, Mister Matthews?" Mac asked.

"Yessir. I agree with Baker. Each of the five ships commissioned in the Outreach Plan was to colonize a planet. Granted, it was for the eventual good of humanity, not just the one hundred men and women placed on the ship. But I feel now that we've arrived and there are already people here, the whole thing was just a waste of time."

"Well, we might as well get everyone's opinion. Winston, what are your thoughts?"

Winston leaned back and sighed. He looked first at Esparza, then at Baker, and finally at Mac. "I don't see how we can adapt," he stated simply. "I mean, we've lived our whole lives in space in a society based on the one we left. Now things are radically different. Mankind has apparently spread to a number of different worlds, and we're at war with spacesharks! What good would we be around here when we have no idea what the technology is like? I'm afraid to go into the bathroom, because I'm not sure I'll be able to recognize the toilet anymore!"

Esparza laughed.

"Looks like we're fairly divided on the issue," Mac observed. He stood up and pushed his seat in. "Let's get aboard ship and get some rest. We'll present the situation to the rest of the crew and see what they think."

"What about you, Mac?" Dave asked. "What do you think?"

"A Captain stays with his ship," he responded flatly. He moved for the door.

Esparza stepped up beside Kincaid and whispered in his ear. "Now there's a dodge if I ever heard one."

* * *

After a few hours of restless sleep, Mac called and all-ship audience in the hangar bay. When the last of the crew trickled in, he turned on the power to the remote PA system Winston had jury-rigged for the occasion and motioned for silence.

"Well, folks, we've arrived. Unfortunately, technology beat us. You see, some time after we left, ships capable of traveling faster than light were built and got here first. The planet has already been colonized."

A dull roar rose within the confines of the ship's hull.

Mac held out his arms. "Please! Everybody! Remain silent!" Slowly the roar faded. When the last murmurs died away, he continued. "Now, as might be expected, things have changed radically. This whole ship, while top-of-the-line at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century and still in the excellent condition, is now obsolete."

"I had a conversation with an officer dirtside, and I have found that man has expanded his boundaries to include at least twelve solar systems and has encountered intelligent alien life. Unfortunately, those aliens are hostile and there is an intense war going on."

Again, the hangar throbbed with the roar of hundreds of voices engaged in conversation.

Mac allowed them to continue for a few moments before signaling for silence. "Journeyman's mission was to reach Salvation II and set up a colony there. In essence, we were to plant the seeds for humanity's expansion.

"It has been said that our mission has failed. Because the world has already been colonized, we no longer have a mission.On the other hand, it has also been said that the true mission was set in the Outreach Plan. This mission was simply to settle new worlds for the benefit of humanity. Just because we didn't make it here first doesn't mean we did not succeed."

"However, since our purpose was to settle a new world, we've traveled all this way and wasted two hundred years for nothing."

"It has been made clear to me that the next step is up to

us. We have the option of settling dirtside. It will take some adaptation and more than a little bit of learning, but I feel we are capable."

"But I have been doing a lot of thinking. Personally, I have been looking forward to the moment we set down on a new planet all my life. All of us have grown up, learning such things as caring for crops, construction of homes from available materials, etc. Now that is all unnecessary. All of this and more will be provided for us. We will become dependent on complete strangers. Our lives will become wasted."

"Now as your Captain, I suppose I could order you all dirtside, or on the other hand, to remain aboard ship to plan our next move. But I don't want to do that. For those of you who want to get off this ship, I will see to it that you are properly taken care of. As for the rest of you, I am open for suggestions."

"What can we do? Live in this junkheap for the rest of our lives?" somebody shouted. "Forget it! It's over! I'm heading dirtside." Choruses of agreement followed.

"Wait a minute!" another voice called out. "Our forefathers set out for a new world! Are we going to let that all go to waste?" Arguments broke out across the hangar.

Kincaid stepped up onto the platform.

"All right everybody! Knock it off! Nobody's sticking you to a decision just yet! Now just hear the Captain out before you make sudden decisions."

Mac paced for a moment. "Look. Im not sure about this next option, but it's a thought. I was thinking to resume the mission. Pass it on to the next generation as it were. I'm sure there are still more planets out there waiting to be explored. I'm proposing we make our way to them and set out for what we were intended to do." He turned and held out his hand. "Come here, Tommy."

A little boy stepped on stage and took Mac's hand. "This is my son. He and other children have grown up being taught the ways of our society. We have to think about them, too."

"Exactly! We can provide for them better planetside!"

"Yeah! They have a lot to learn yet, and they should be able to adapt sooner than us adults!"

Mac nodded. "I thought the same thing. At first. What I don't want is for them to condemn us because we gave up when there was another option. I want his generation to continue what we started for them! Don't you see? By landing now, we're telling our children that it's all over."

Mac lifted Tommy into his arms. "I intend to pass my Captainship on to him. And I intend it to go further down the line than that, if that's what it takes! Ten generations of my family have waited for the moment we set down on a fresh new world and God damn it, that's what will happen if it takes ten more generations! Who's with me?"

Applause rang out across the hangar bay. Mac smiled and ruffled Tommy's hair.

"How does he do it?" Esparza asked Dave with a grin.

* * *

"What?!" O'Neill shouted incredulously.

"We want to continue our mission," Mac repeated.

"How? Are you insane?"

"Sir, you gave us a choice, and we made it. There are a few families that want to settle, but the rest of us are pressing on. If possible, I would like you to update our astrogation computer to give us complete control. I would also like updated starcharts and astrogation equipment."

O'Neill sat on the edge of his desk. "I must say, I admire your tenacity. But are you sure you're making the right decision?"

"Not really. But the crew is behind me. We plan to go for all or nothing. There is no in-between, and there'll be no giving up."

"Very well, I can have some techs on your ship as early as tomorrow morning. I'm also ordering a complete overhaul of your ship. We'll refit you for FTL travel and install modern equipment."

"Do we have time to learn it?"

"Most of it will be controlled by the ship's computers. Of course, technical details and schematics will be downloaded into your databases. I can provide for crack training of your crew also."

"Thank you, sir."

"Wait. That's some expensive hardware I'm giving you. Let's talk trade."

Mac's eyes narrowed. "What kind of trade?"

O'Neill chuckled. "Don't worry! I'm not disabling your ship or anything! First, I want all your old stuff for salvage. Second, I would like samples from your foodstores. Fair enough?" Mac considered. The first part was easy as they would

have no need for parts that had been replaced. As far as the second request was concerned, food on the ship came from hydroponic gardens, artificial greenhouses, and livestock in the small stockyard. Stock from the gardens replenished itself as new seeds were replanted. Livestock, of course, bred keeping their populations constant. "Very well. I accept." He heartily shook O'Neill's hand.

"Good. I'll make plans and be in touch shortly."

* * *

Mac took his position at the conn facing the viewscreen. "How does everything look?"

Esparza sat at the helm. "Tip-top shape, Captain. This new stuff is amazing! They've been training me with it for a month, and I'm still learning new things."

"Engines are prepped and ready to go," the ship's engineer stated. "I was told to be prepared for a strange lurch when we make the jump past light speed. It's a little disorienting, but it passes quickly." "Our course is laid in. We await your orders, sir."

"Very well. Give me one-half light speed until we leave the solar system. Then kick it up to seventy-five percent."

"Aye aye, sir."

The ship slowly left orbit and moved at a bearing taking it out of the solar system and away from the rest of the colonized worlds.

Mac activated the PA system. "Attention, crew members. We are on our way. Mission's End lies far ahead of us. But our children will find their homes there, and we can be content with the knowledge that we have provided for them and have succeeded in our mission."

"Here's to the promise of the future and a brave, new world."

Creating God

Joseph Burza

If there is no God in the infinite heavens,
I will create one.
I will do so devoting
All my life,
All my soul,
All my essence to the task.
And should time swallow me before this accomplishment,
other men would willingly be pressed to continue my divine quest.
My desperate need for the existence of a superior
would be praised by holy men of our day.
Even these men however would deem me "misguided"
or worse could they peer into my reasoning; for

I'd create God, only to thank Him.

I'd not sing lyrics of thanksgiving for
the earth, nor its sky,
its vast landscapes, its waters,
its moon, its seasons,
its days, its nights,
Its many creatures;
nor my life before me, or its memories behind.
These wonderful puzzle pieces which interlock to form
my world are beautiful in all aspects; and
any thinking creature would express
undying gratitude to their magnanimous creator.
But these "life's treasures" I would barely mention to God, because
they all pale by the final part,
the one which breathes life into the entire image!
It's this fragile fragment which removes the mystery and
gives all else anticipated meaning.
It is only this piece for which I'd create God -

I'd create God, only to thank Him for you.

The Pilot

Carla Taylor

The take-off was perfect.
I settle back, nervousness eased, to wonder.
Wonder at the awesome view around me, below me,
And the person to my left.

I remember the day they pulled you out of me.
A Son - so dependent on me for life.
How did we get here, roles reversed so quickly?
My life now depends on your skills.
And I know full well
Of your difficulties keeping your car on the road.

Let us pray... that the skies are safer.

You turn and smile and tell me that
You'll take me anywhere I want to go.
The sun is setting, the sky perfectly clear.
Lights have come on in the city below
Making a criss-cross pattern of stars.
The beauty is overwhelming.

But there's a catch to this ride.
The pilot wants to show me what he can do.
I say no, but I'm not the pilot.

They were called "wingovers."
(Oh my God, where's the horizon?)
The experience reminded me of my friend's
Description of some people:

"Religious to the throw-up kind."

Falling Skies

Janine Passehl

the sky is
falling
spiraling
down around us
making love to you
in a cascade of
euphoria, i
tumble
slip
into your soul -
in you i am
whole but
teetering
on the edge of
delirium
from emotional
earthquakes
and hearts
shattered by
falling skies.

So Many Summers

Dojna Corzine

give me an answer to what i'm still thinking
i'm ever too close for discerning your meaning
the tricks you try with me fall straight to the ground
and lie there and laugh - the love you've unwound in
pools and forests and moon-bitten streetglow
i'm shaking with secrets and shadows that you show
i'm silent with thunder and your words give nothing
to cover contented this numbness and rustling

Memory Mirror

Keleigh Biggins

Lynn wandered into the room. It had been shut off for two years now, and she couldn't stand it any longer. The door creaked open and bumped into the bookshelf Timmy had put behind it.

The room looked exactly as Lynn remembered. The walls were as blue as a robin's egg, and the white blinds on the windows were twisted open just like Tim used to leave them. Midafternoon sunlight fell across Lynn's face as she looked into the mirror on the dresser. She wondered how many times Timmy had pushed her aside for doing that; he had always thought she was a conceited pain in the butt. Lynn sighed and sat on the bare, sheetless bed, remembering. Lynn and Tim had been as close as two siblings could be. They had done almost everything together, much to Tim's dismay. His best friends, Luke and Jerry, had felt the same way when Lynn met them three years ago when she was fifteen. Lynn hadn't been able to drive, but her brother was sixteen, and he got a car on the condition that Lynn could tag along with him. Relations were a bit forced at first, but gradually Tim, Luke, and Jerry got used to her hanging out with them. Wherever they went, Tim led the way.

Timmy got their group out of many scrapes and tight spots when they went out together. They went bowling and ice skating and to the movies together. Gradually, after a year, their group of friends grew. Yet Tim remained the leader. Like the time they got busted for drinking. Luke had told Tim about an old abandoned factory where they could party undisturbed. About five carloads of teenagers arrived, and they were armed with music, good attitudes, and alcohol. Miller Genuine Draft was the first thing to be passed around and after that, vodka and Jack Daniels appeared. Lynn had been drinking a can of MGD when the cops arrived.

But Tim had known how to handle them. He had been careful all night to make sure everyone got rid of their empty cans, so when the cops checked, all the kids were clean. Timmy had done all the talking ,and after the officer checked the drivers' licenses to make sure no one had a record, they were free to go. Everyone had gotten off scot free.

Tim had been their leader and their idol. Lynn remembered how the phone used to ring all day long Fridays and Saturdays. That had been something which used to irritate her, but now Lynn wished futiley for that simple annoyance.

"Lynn?" Her mother's call brought her back to reality, and Lynn hurried from the room; she didn't want to upset her mother by being caught in Timmy's room.

"Yes, Mother," Lynn asked, "what do you need?"

"I just wanted to let you know that I'm going out for a while, dear."

As her mother went out the door, Lynn noticed how she seemed ten years older than her age of thirty-five. Her hair was almost completely white, and wrinkles covered her once-smooth cheeks. Lynn's mother hadn't taken the news of Timmy's death very well.

For a while, Luke and especially Jerry had called Lynn begging her to go bowling or skating, but she had always refused. Lynn's mother wasn't the only one who missed Tim. He had been Lynn's champion whenever anyone picked on her, despite his own teasing. She just couldn't believe he was gone forever. Lynn kept expecting him to come home any minute and call her a pest. But he never would.

Lynn remembered back to that awful, black night. She had been in her room struggling through algebra homework when she heard a car screech to a stop, too late. Impact sounded. Lynn was about to look out her bedroom window when she heard her mother scream as if all hell had broken looose. Lynn ran outside, and a bloodcurdling scream escaped her own throat. Timmy's lifeless form was mangled almost beyond recognition. A black four-door car had been racing away, swerving madly to avoid justice. Timmy's head had been broken open, and his limbs were at odd angles. A bloody pulp was all that was left of his face. Only his blue-jean jacket with a Marine Corps pin from Lynn's father identified him beyond doubt.

When Lynn returned to reality, she found herself back in Tim's room for only the second time in two years. The sunlight had mostly faded from the room, but that didn't stop Lynn from smiling at an almost-dark image of herself. She looked and looked into Timmy's mirror, her smile getting bigger, and she decided to go call Luke and Jerry to see if they wanted to go bowling. As she walked out of Tim's room, Lynn left the door open, and the day's last rays of sunlight filtered out into the hallway.

Dancing with Clarabelle

Joseph Chellino

Whenever I'd ask Mother, she'd say she didn't know, and we couldn't ask because it wouldn't be decent. For that reason I never found out why. I don't imagine too many other people knew either.

Clarabelle is just the sweetest little thing. I mean, at first I was kind of spooked by her, but now she is my best friend. Her mother loves me when I come over, I am the only kid who does because of what Mother calls Clarabelle's "imperfections." You see, Clarabelle doesn't have any legs, and where her arms should be there are just two little stumpy hands kinda sprouting out of her side. Where her eyes should have been, there is just a patch of smooth skin. She has a mouth just like everyone else but just two holes where her nose ought to be. She's got normal enough ears, but I don't think they work all that well. Still Clarabelle and I are great friends.

Her mother says it is important to touch Clarabelle - that's how she talks to people, I guess.

STOP TOUCHING ME!

A lot of times I bring over my dolls and just put them in her stumpy little hands. When she plays with my toys, I usually just brush her little patch of hair and talk to her.

GET AWAY FROM ME!

I don't think she can hear me, but her mother says she can learn my vibrations.

It was kind of scary. Like a couple off weeks ago when Clarabelle and I were playing, I put on a record, picked her up, and pretended she and I were dancing. We were spinning around the room like they do on television when I slipped. She hit the wall kind of hard, and her mother screamed up the stairs. I told her Clarabelle threw one of my toys, but Clarabelle started squealing really loud. I tried holding her to calm her down so her mother wouldn't hear and all, but then she would start spitting and biting and trying to get at me with her stumpy little hands.

PUT ME DOWN!

Her mother ran into the room and yelled at me to leave. I wasn't allowed to go to Clarabelle's for a week after that. Mother said it was doctor's orders.

I thought a lot about Clarabelle that week. I wondered why God would do what he did to her but still give her such beautiful skin and that perfect mouth. All she can do is hum and moan and stuff, though. I sometimes think Clarabelle should be dead. I wonder why her mother and the doctors keep her alive. It's kind of like with Gran. Gran had a disease, and they kept putting tubes and stuff in her and putting her on machines to make her heart beat and make her breathe so she wouldn't stop. I thought that was terrible. I only visited her once. I wanted to rip all of those big ugly machines off her and let her die. Of course, I'd never told anyone that..

I went back to Clarabelle's after the week was over. Her mother answered the door after a while. It always took her a long time. She was smoking and drinking something (I'm not sure what), but she sure looked and smelled godawful. Father always asked about her, always called her a "friggin' crazy lush." Anyway, she took my coat and led me to Clarabelle's room.

Clarabelle was rolling around in her play pen with her stumpy little hands grabbing for air, but she'd hit the side and roll back.

LET ME OUT OF HERE!

She had a big bandage on the back of her head - her mother said that's where the doctors fixed her. I was kind of angry because they had to shave off Clarabelle's patch of hair to get to the bad part, so now she was completely bald like a baby - or like Father - I couldn't decide which.

All I Wanted

Angela Brooks

All I wanted was to be with you forever
but now I know forever could be six months or six years
and you're no longer healthy to be around.
How Long?
How long will we have?
How long till you leave me to decorate your gravestone like cemetery flowers
fragile and fading
petals blowing away silently
just as if I was never there at all...
Will you remember?
In the dying nuances of a spirit's fading memory -
will you remember me once more, until you are lost in the throng of used souls as I will be too...soon.

Untitled

Maggie Clay

I want a man
to take a chance with me
ride out of this town down
the road

in my convertible ford

i've got stars in my eyes
crazy love on my mind
i want to reach the sea
and take a swim

in sweet sincere laughter

i want to select a shimmering
sunset
upon some lazy seashore
and feel

if only for a while

nestled in a warm
breeze
whispering
secrets of wisdom.

Can You Imagine?

Steve Cutter

Can you imagine the courage displayed
as I wondered of your love for me?
- Or was it frantic fear?
Can you fathom the steady mind required
as I wondered of another man?
- Or was it panic, dear?

No answer could I hear more clearly than
the deafening shout of your silence,
which broke my heart in two.
No desert bare, nor ocean deep and black
could match my empty, darkened spirit
at the moment I lost you.

Now, in quiet desperation, but with
purpose and resolve, I will leave you
to your separate life.
For it might be better that you see a
world beyond just me, and in the end
discover that you're my wife.

Ode to the Tortured Soul

Zach Donaldson

Oh, blackness.
Dark, despairing souls
As dark, as blackened
As a bowling ball.
Oh, heart-rending pain
ah, tortured existence!
My ever-damned soul
Banished to hell
for eternity
as dark and forboding
as Kingsford charcoal briquettes.
Alack, my enduring mind
my heart
bleak reminder
of the eternal punishment
that I must endure
colorless
thoughtless
mindless
blackened afresh
as a good electrical tape.
Yea, pause,
and hear me, enlightened one;
I bid thee to heed the words
of this shell of a man
Never allow your soul, nay,
your brain, to become like
a Goodyear tire
after the cinders hath been spread;
akin to a steaming cup of java;
somewhat resembling
that pimple upon yon countenance
that hath grown to the point
where a black encrusted head
encircles the top
and only after considerable pain and
agony
May one forcibly pop it.
Oh, 'swounds, I cast mineself at your feet
I beggar my lowly existence
unto you.
I should ne'er hope that my
used motor oil-like soul
be bequeathed unto you.
Oh, the agony,
oh, despair,
Will the blackness ever end?

Distractions

Dojna Corzine

his hand finds its hold in the curve of my side
i try not to notice the need he can't hide
and pray for my patience to melt in the sun
and center attention on what i've begun

Drawing Life

Carla Taylor

Sometimes I have to
Squint to see what's really
Valuable. The darks and
Lights become obvious with the petty details
Obscured.
That's a trick of the trade in drawing.

But does it work in life?

Sometimes I have to
Close my eyes
To really see.

One of the Chosen

Margo Winder

"Are we almost there?" I felt my hands tighten on the steering wheel. "Ask me one more time, and we're going home." I was sure the emphasis on the last word would have had enough impact, but I shot a steely "if there wasn't company in the car with us" look in the rearview mirror. She met my glance with an equally evil stare - then, rolling her eyes, she haughtily crossed her arms across her chest and jerked her head towards the window. Was that action inbred in all women? I still even did it to my husband, Dan. "Ah, Dan, lucky you," I thought. He was home right now, bowl of Jewel brand popcorn in his lap, remote control in his right hand, thumb poised on the channel up-down button.

It had been my idea to take the kids skating tonight. Laurie had gotten such a good report card we had told her she could bring a friend. Way before I had expected, Laurie had entered the "you mean I'm just going to get to go with my little brother?" stage. Now we were forced to discuss, at the onset of each outing, whether this would be just family or not. The good report card had won us over, and Laurie had sprinted to the phone to see if her new "best friend" for the month, Angie, could go. I had closed my eyes and said a quick prayer that Angie would not be making the trip with us, but by the squeals coming from our end of the phone I knew she was coming.

It wasn't her bringing a friend that I minded - it was this friend. Angie was in Laurie's fifth grade class, although I was sure there had been some mix-up in her records, and she was supposed to have been in sixth. She had already started to convince Laurie that boys were not as "gross" as Laurie had imagined, an image that I was going to keep fueling as long as possible with the exception, of course, being her younger brother. I had overheard Angie telling Laurie one day that when Jeff Mockner made milk seep out of the corners of his mouth in the cafeteria it was not to get her to move away from him but because he liked her. Having taught third grade before having our kids, I knew Angie was wrong - he did want her to move; but I kept quiet, not wanting to expose my cover.

On another day Laurie had been sent to the nurse's office for a stomach ache. I had gone immediately to pick her up, stopping on the way for Seven-Up and more saltines. I propped her up on the couch and wrapped her favorite "comfy-cozy" blanket around, then went to see what I could thaw out for dinner. In the span of 15 minutes, Laurie had gotten up and went into the bathroom and closed the door about five times. After not hearing the toilet flush even once, I tapped on the door. The door had not been secured so it opened slightly. Through the crack I could see Laurie's reflection in the mirror. She had her pants down around her ankles and her face staring straight down into the crotch of her underpants. Her head jerked up to see mine in the mirror. She had screamed "Mom," stretching it to a three syllable word before slamming the door. After a great deal of pampering and downright begging, I found that Angie had informed her that any day Laurie could be getting her period. Laurie said she had told her that wasn't true, and Angie had shot back with a list of three girls in the fourth grade, all of whom Laurie had conveniently not heard of who had started their period. Angie had continued to tell her that two of them had started at SCHOOL! After lunch Laurie said her stomach hurt. Not wanting to take any chances of suffering the same fate as those two unfortunate ones, she immediately talked her way to the nurse's office and then home.

That night after putting Laurie and her brother Kevin to bed, I attempted to draw Dan into my plan to rid the family of this "friend" that had robbed my only daughter of the excitement and anticipation of her first period and replaced it with fear. He had finally convinced me that if she hadn't heard from Angie she would have heard it from someone else. "Let's just ride this one out and in a couple of weeks, Angie will be old news."

"Mrs. Markum, I believe it's up there on the right." Angie's voice came from the back of the van. She had such an Eddie Haskell quality about her. Sure enough, there it was. The familiar domed roof and the bright white sign out front surrounded by colored balls of light, about a fourth of which were burnt out. Skateland.

It had just reopened three years ago after remaining boarded up for five years. The new owners had worked hard to restore the old Skateland image of the seventies. They had topped the roof with a coat of bright yellow paint to cover all the graffiti from the groups of teenagers that had hung out in the parking lot while it was vacant. A huge Grand Opening banner had been strapped across the front, shocking passersby who hadn't seen life in the building for so long. The owners had advertised in the Hamphill Gazette offering reduced admission coupons and a schedule of the upcoming week's activities. Tonight was Junior Skate night; only those thirteen and under and their parents would be allowed in. I was sure Angie was hoping many thirteen year old boys would grace the varnished plywood floors. With that thought, I was glad I had decided to chaperone instead of Dan. He would have spent his time at the snack bar with Kevin, sipping a Diet Coke and devouring a plastic tray of tostadas and cheese product, oblivious to Laurie and Angie.

Rock salt crunched under our feet as we made our way to the glass entrance. After paying the admission, we squeezed through a turnstile with a herd of pre-teens and then burst through into the rink.

I clutched Kevin's hand as the girls sprang forward to the small window marked "Skate Rentals $1.25." I shook my head. When I used to come, it had only been 50 cents. Of course then on my twelfth birthday, I became one of the elite. I had gotten my own set of roller

skates. They were pure white set atop silver wheels so shiny you could see your reflection in them - of course, only until after the first time I wore them. They were laced with red, white, and blue shoelaces. Patriotism was at its peak with the coming of the Bicentennial.

Now the young man behind the window was shoving skates of every neon color at the wall of outstretched hands.

"What size ya need, lady?" He pointed his finger impatiently at me. I reeled off the sizes to him. Instantly he was back, passing skates to me. The girls took off as I handed them their bright green skates. I held onto Kevin's, a shiny metallic gray pair.

"Just a minute. I gotta go to the back for yours." I sighed and beckoned to the girls to help Kevin over the benches and start putting on their skates.

"Sorry. This is all I got left. Not too many in your size." His outstretched hand held what looked like high-top bowling shoes on wheels. The right side was a muddy brown - the left a marred beige separated down the middle by large white stitches. The wheels were dark brown and worn. As I reached for the skates, I silently cursed the fact that I had to skate at all. Kevin was only five so I had known I would have to skate with him for a while, at least until he found some of his kindergarten friends. But now, as I twisted the ends of my frayed shoelace and tried to push it through the hole, my thoughts rushed back to Dan, cozy in his recliner. Well, this is what mothers are supposed to do, right?

"You can get those, can't you, Kev?" I made no attempt to help him with his skates, hoping to prolong the inevitable. I glanced around and saw a flurry of familiar faces of moms from PTO meetings and class parties. We all smiled wanly at each other out of sympathy and support. Kevin was already on his second skate. Who the hell taught him to tie so fast?

I arched my back. It was already sore just from sitting on this bench. I ran my fingers over the smooth wood. I wondered how long it would take before loins of passion would cause boys to take keys in hand to carve out a message of love into the wood. I vowed then and there to check the bench each time for any additions to the bench bearing Laurie's name.

I craned my neck and could see the girls coming around the top curve of the rink. The glass ball turning on the ceiling splashed specks of color on the floor as the rhythmic beat of Madonna's "Material Girl" caused girls' hips to sway. That part hadn't changed. I remember the girls and I would just sit and marvel at the same glass ball. They would speed it up as the DJ played all our favorites. As once in a lifetime hits like "Kung-Fu Fighting" would come on, we'd skate to the beat trying to put a hint of sensuality in each thrust of our skate while talking and joking with each other like it took no effort to be so provocative. This was all in preparation for the magical moment that would take place twice each night - the Couples Only Dance. It was what the entire night was centered around - its purpose being to get chosen to dance.

We knew when to anticipate it. After an especially loud song, the music would stop. The lights would go off, and the glass ball would barely turn on its axis. The DJ would lower his voice to almost a whisper and would say in a throaty voice, "Now it's time for the Couples Only Dance. Go find that special someone and get her out there on the floor." Then he'd play some extremely sappy tune like "My Eyes Adored You." All the girls in my group would form into a ball in the corner. We'd try to have conversations with each other, but no one was paying attention. Our eyes would nervously dart around the room looking for prospects headed our way.

Shirley Richter always got chosen, and it would always be by one of the most sought-after boys. One boy in particular that made our hearts stop was nicknamed "Sparky." He worked at the rink, so he always had to wear something besides jeans. He'd usually wear some black polyester bell bottoms with a wild print shirt. Then sticking out of his back pocket so everyone could see would be the handle of his long, red, wide-toothed comb. He'd take it out right before the Couples Dance and run it through his black hair, checking it with his other hand to make sure it was feathered back perfectly on either side of the part. That was always one of our clues that the Couples Dance would be soon.

So Shirley would be off with Sparky, and we would stare at them skating, holding hands. We'd giggle and begin to get very nervous since the first part of the song was now over. Of the five of us, usually only three would get chosen. What I couldn't figure out was why it was never me? Okay, sure - my hair was long and stringy, and I wore wire frame glasses that made me look like John Lennon. I knew that the colored lights reflected off my braces when I smiled and that my skates being on put me over six feet, but I had boobs. That should have counted for something!

Oh, I did get chosen once by PeeWee Michaels. They called him PeeWee because he stood 4'10 in the sixth grade. Poor PeeWee's reputation had preceded him. Just for the mere fact that he was short, he had always been picked on and teased. His name was always the one the girls would use as the ultimate comeback. In a sparring of who liked whom, a retort of "You like PeeWee Michaels" always resulted in a multitude of gasps.

So I had no choice but to turn him down that night. Had I known then that he would be my only chance at getting chosen, I would have endured all the giggles. Rumor had it that now PeeWee was a 6'3 stockbroker with the face of a Greek god. Who'd have known?

"Mom, let's go!" Kevin was stamping his foot impatiently.

"O.K., but as soon as you get the hang of this, you're on your own. Mom's too old for this."

I took his hand, feeling stupider by the minute but knowing it was my duty. I was surprised by how

quickly I fell back into the old rhythm. If it had just been Kevin and me, it might have even been fun.

Each time we passed by the front entrance, I strained to see if there were any other boys from Kevin's class. Finally on about the twentieth time around the rink, my looking paid off. Jenny Wiederstrom walked in, trailed by her mom. No, it wasn't a boy, but she would do. Jenny and Kevin had been in pre-school together and had been disappointed when they weren't in the same kindergarten class this year. Her mom and I had worked together several times at PTO fundraisers, and I was anxious to catch up with her. I pointed Jenny out to Kevin, and we hurriedly exited the rink and met them at the rental window.

In minutes Jenny and Kevin were off, stumbling their way around the rink. I double-checked for the girls and signaled to them where I'd be, then went off to the snack bar with Jenny's mom. Other moms from Kevin's class began trickling in and before long, the comraderie of a meeting of mothers had taken over. Hot chocolates in hand, it was inevitable that we would begin to compare notes on our experiences at Skateland when we were young.

Suddenly the music stopped, and the lights began to dim.

"Oh, no!" The moms spoke in unison.

"I was hoping they weren't going to do this tonight," I sighed. Laurie didn't need to know about this yet. There was plenty of time for that.

We all stood up and searched the floor for our prospective children. The entire rink had cleared in a matter of seconds. Pre-teens were slamming into the three foot wall separating the rink from the lobby. They began funneling themselves through one of the two narrow passageways and then quickly finding their moms or their cliques, depending on their age group. As the DJ's voice began the same whispery lounge-lizard tone of yesteryear, the slow enticement of Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You" seeped through the speakers.

I spotted Laurie and Angie not tucked away on a corner as I had hoped but talking with a group of boys that seemed to be in about the fifth grade although it was so hard to tell now. Kids seemed so much older. Laurie's eyes met mine with a look of sheer panic. I had to act fast. Was this a look of "Help me, Mom, I'm not ready for this" or "Oh, God, I will die if you come over here now." When Angie's eyes met mine with the same look, I knew it was the latter.

I located Kevin and Jenny, and we made our way back to our table at the snack bar. Apparently the other moms had received the same welcome since the table was once again full. After setting Jenny and Kevin up at the table next to ours, I slid into the padded folding chair beside Jenny's mom. As women are so capable of doing, we picked up right where we had left off in our conversation. I was listening attentively as one of the moms was telling how she found their loose guinea pig three weeks too late when a flash of green on the rink caught my eye.

It was Laurie. Skating beside her, holding her hand, was a boy I recognized from her class. As she passed the snack bar, she braved a quick glance and a look - a look that said it all, that said "It's okay, Mom. It's no big deal," but at the same time it screamed, "Can you believe it, Mom? It's me!" I gave her a reassuring smile, and she was gone. Tears formed in my eyes. I tried hard not to blink to keep them in. No matter what happened or if it ever happened again, Laurie could rest easy. There would be a million other pressures in her life, but not this one. She would know, and her friends would know...she had been chosen.

Then it hit me, and I knew even before I looked in the corner. Angie was sitting on the bench, head down, tying and retying her skate. In that instant I came to see Angie as more than just a loud-mouthed, obnoxious thorn in our side. I saw her as I once was eighteen years before.

On the way home, Kevin slept while Laurie chattered incessantly about the usual trivial things. Angie piped in occasionally. At the stoplight on Brainard and Main, I met Angie's stare in the rearview mirror, and our eyes exchanged thoughts. Before the light turned green, my eyes told her it was only one night. She was only ten, and there would be so many more opportunities. Angie's eyes told me, "I know. Just get me home so I can talk to my pillow."

The Meaningless Words

Lorraine Johnson

The meaningless words
that flow from your mouth
make me sink way into the ground
I am trapped
I cannot escape
the incredible power that extracts
from every pore in your body

An Angel...

Angela Brooks

An angel is just a ghost
in drag
        gender bender spirits
   dressing up for heaven's holy
underwear festivals.

Belief

Tony Loveland

Within religion
        there is philosphy
Within death
        there is reality

Only then you shall discover
    the reality of religion.

God

Angela Brooks

He may be a force
        could be the wind
watching over us from another realm.

The stars, they hang in
interminable atmosphere
protecting us from his sight
forever looking down to see our "nothing"
in the night.

Daze

Dojna Corzine

so your moonshock fell away in this
forgotten backyard quiet mist
in dreams of calling bigger crowds
and smaller thoughts to darn my clouds
you fell back laughing at my size
and when i smiled you drowned your eyes
in what they made you understand
in colors dimmer than our crayons

Into the Vortex

Janine Passehl

desire
        sorrow
    obsession
            pleasure
swirl in the gloom
of an endless spiral,
revolving forever in
    denial.

When I Was...

Robb Barrett

When I was a child, I used to stare into the sky a lot hoping to one day be able to stare directly into the sun without blinding myself. At the time it seemed logical: I could see the filaments in light bulbs after staring at them for a while, so why not the same for the sun?

But I guess that's just what childhood is all about: illogical reasoning now, but it all seemed to make so much sense back then. I think I miss my innocent days as a child more than anything else in my life. Back in those warm summers that seemed to last forever when my bike and a friend were all I needed for days of adventure and excitement.

Back long ago when riding my bike to the drug store to get a candy bar was a challenge and an adventure, and playing in the school playground at dusk with all the other kids in the neighborhood was something I hoped would never end. Before I had to worry about school, a job, my girlfriend, and everything else in life, there was my childhood.

It's gone now, but I still haven't figured out exactly when it left. Was it back in my first days at a public school when I found out how babies are really made, or was it much later in life when I found out that I would be able to make babies? Was it when I found out that the greatest feeling in life is not hanging out with friends all day long but having sex (which DID feel a lot better than masturbating?)

Or did I lose my innocence and childhood when I started looking critically at the world and no longer saw it as a happy, sunny place of fun but as a drab, grey mausoleum of toxic waste, chemicals, pain, and hatred? Or was it when the childhood love of the Easter Bunny turned into lust for the White Rabbit? I can't exactly seem to place where my innocence died, and I became more mature. I can't figure out the exact moment when I found myself yelling at my mom instead of clutching her leg for protection. It could have been when I found out about the Lies: the Easter Bunny, Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and the promise that my world would be a good, safe place to live.

It's hard nowadays to think back to the hot, sweaty days of summer when I used to run through the sprinkler in the front yard. I think back to the kid who stood up for me against the bully in fifth grade, and now my "hero" is in jail for shooting someone in a gang-related fight.

I guess that the closest I can come to figuring out when I lost my childhood naivete was when the illusion came crashing down. The illusion that my world would be a safe, magical place to live. A place where the world didn't have wars and diseases and plagues. When I figured out that the world my parents promised me would be mine would never happen, and it was their fault, was when I died and became grown-up.

My Memories

Joseph Burza

Each of my memories is bittersweet.

Bitter,
because distant they are;
Sweet,
because they once were.

I'm Losing Myself

Angela Brooks

I'm losing myself
renouncing reality
between half-empty and half-full
thoughts create a place where I can find mercy from the emotional anarchy.

Desires and moody dreamscapes turn round and round
in a divine spin cycle
that stops at half-dry and half-wet
only I can wring myself out from the inside
purging wash and wear nightmares
to try and start at the beginning of a process with no end.

Rift

Dojna Corzine

i am open HAVE MY SHADOWS
give me reasons i can touch
still my thoughts with burning fingers
STILL MY THOUGHTS but not too much

Raw

Dojna Corzine

your depth and your triangles twisting my skin
I'll convert my circumference to bringing you in
i'm ground down like gravel and passing the day
waking my words up when you look away

Dreamland

Janine Passehl

the sun now sets
awaits the dawn as
night devours
brightness
and sunlight is
smothered
in a seduction of
darkness,
i am carried
away to
murky horizons
chasing shadows of
lost loves
in the blindness of
night.

i visit
dreamland
and you
are there.

A Drink to Reality

Crista Fabrycki

I really should write down all of my thoughts as soon as I think them - meaningful thoughts, that is. How do I know the difference? Intuitiveness, I guess - but I don't, because I'm lazy. To think is enough. To write, too much.

"You'll never be a true artist," says my artistic dad, "because you don't dedicate your time."

Maybe he's right, but I am only nineteen years old. I have plenty of time. Right? Of course unless I die tomorrow or next week in some freak accident. I'm proud of Dad, though. He says he's proud of me, too. Hmm.

God, I love caffeine. I love sleep more, though - that's why I need to love caffeine. Except I hate it when I'm running out of coffee in my cup and when the rim of my cup touches my lip, and I tip my cup and instead of seeing all brown, I see the bottom, and in the bottom I see my eyes and sometimes the top of my nose depending on how much caffeine I have left, and then I realize I'm going to have to get up out of my chair and go to the kitchen and pour my coffee, but it's such a hassle because I am lazy.

And of course I realize that.

Sometimes I close my eyes when I tip my cup and I know I'm coming to the end, but eventually I'll have to open my eyes and face the truth, so why even bother? But sometimes I do bother. That's why I like to study or read or sit or whatever in family restaurants because a waitress continually refills my cup or if she's lazy, she'll leave a pot on the table. And that's okay 'cause I'm not that lazy that it bothers me to pick up my arm to lift the pot to refill my cup. I mean, I'd be a hypocrite if I said I was too lazy to do that seeing as I pick up my arm to pick up my cup filled with my precious drink.

Anyway, I could go through this and revise my words to make them sound right or poetic but I'm not going to, not because I'm lazy, but I don't think I'd be being honest. I mean, I'm writing down my thoughts, and these are my thoughts. My thoughts can't be found in my ragged thesaurus. And that's something I'm working on: honesty - honesty with myself and with others.

When I see my reflection , at least I'm honest when I say I'm too damn lazy to go to the kitchen to get more of my drug. Yup, psychologists call my caffeine a drug. Anyway, I always go to get my coffee so I won't go to my lovely bed to go to sleep instead. If I could sleep all day and all night every day, I would. That's the truth. I love dreams. But that's not too realistic, is it? And honestly, I need to stop being idealistic. So I'll use my drug which actually may not be too honest - but just because psychologists say drugs are bad, does that really mean they are? - to help me be realistic.

Like I said, I'm proud of Dad, but sometimes he's not too realistic in expectations about art...about me. But he tries. Is anyone ALWAYS realistic, I wonder. Sometimes I think he tries too hard to be an artist, not honest about "real" life. Ah shit, I guess I'd better not start about "real" life or I'll never get my psychology homework read. But Dad, he loves his bed too - maybe it's genetic then - and he loves his coffee too. Maybe someday when we're petting one of our cats, I'll ask him what he thinks about it.

I never knew I felt so strongly about coffee. I guess the whole concept is meaningful to me. How about that? If I hadn't written my thoughts to begin with, I would have never known. Oh, by the way, if I ever say anything to you that seems funny or even offensive - although I hope not - please just brush it aside with the knowledge that I'm only trying to be honest and that maybe in this stage of my life I speak my thoughts too quickly without thinking too clearly. Or maybe I'm just wired from a late night of studying, not enough of my greatly loved sleep, and too much caffeine.

Yeah, the latter sounds like a cop-out to me, too. Well, like I said, I'm still workin' on my honesty.

Christmas

Tony Loveland

Christmas, Christmas, time was here,
was time for booze and time for beer.
For Santa Claus I won't forget,
the bastard brought me a Chia Pet.
I would like to kick him in the ass,
but come on, Grandma, where's the cash?
We can hardly stand the wait,
so Christmas don't be late.

Winter White

Marianne Nowak

A refulgent blue sky and verglas ground
quisiling qualms anguish with clarity stark as reflux snow
impelling me to tell you that it's time that you go
Essentially quiet, the birds only sound.

Whitewashed trees without leaves as a clutter
mark their places apparent now as the hills and valleys
Mammonism lacerates veragious tallies
where panchreston myopia verge to mutter.

White feather-tipped clouds appear to be still
while snow falls like a mantra to be quintessential
mistress, concubine cohabit, are our vows still essential
after twenty years and six kids, isolation has its fill

A cardinal in the shrub with two sparrows, whose suspension?
The sparrows fly away and interrupt dissension.

Only Words

Steve Cutter

I'm sure by now my words do fall
on ears as hard as stone.
I know I've said them all before;
I've broken oaths in which I've swore
to grow and change and learn,
Then left you lone once more.

You see, my love, I understand
your doubt that I can grow.
My words are thin, they're just a rhyme,
the true test will be passed through time.
But time, I fear, is short.
You've barred me from your heart.

So why then should a woman who
could clearly have the best,
trust this man, respect his claim
of love and truth and honest aim
to bare his very soul;
And then not quit again?

Thought You Were

Dojna Corzine

i unwound and you fell in
razed my mind and scraped my skin
traced my sequence with your lines
turned my eyes to other times

Final Tribute to Jim

Angela Brooks

In your world of shaman's dance, lizard skin, Machiavellian romance
holding wineglass aloft moonbeams spill across your smile - lips
speaking of the desert highway, ghostly Indian miles.

It wasn't too hard to find you, wandering through my dreams
following your perpetual trails of
cigarette smoke -
clouding my consciousness
with every perfect inch of you, decorated in imagery, hanging
from a balcony, swearing that I'll love you forever

and our ideas shall die
like the sunset
moon rising over Paris.

Target

Dojna Corzine

bulletholes, i call the shots
fill your hands with what i'm not
stake my claim and take my aim
and fire back with all i've got

Over

Dojna Corzine

the word i skipped split up the town
and losing one day dragged us down
and we were left to grow the dark
and sleep in treetops in the park

Michael

Charlene Wagner

A man of his own will
with cars and dreams always on his mind

A short-lived mind, snapped from us
in two
one dark May night

As he sat doing exactly what he wanted to do
pondering death, facing life

Those last few minutes -
when the cycle revved near
and his eyes opened and closed
for the last time

He thought about his dad
and those whom he loved and who loved him -
he blinked
And his Melanie in life was gone
forever
leaving his Mark in the world.

Spielberg's *Meisterstück**

Mary Frances Lund

I ate popcorn the first time,
thinking this comforting act
would keep my emotions in control —
until suddenly my sensibilities rebelled
at the cinematic horror of black and white images
alleviated just once
with indelible red —
images of souls fifty years dead,
searing images
that pierced my breast
as popcorn fell silently to the floor.

I ponder my interest
in a subject so horrifying, so appalling.
Why do names like Wiesel, Mengele, Wallenberg
mesmerize me?
Why do I read again
and again
the accounts of Dachau, Buchenwald, Thieresenstadt?
Why do I sit once,
twice,
through a film that each time
leaves me tearful,
breathless,
desperately seeking answers to
ancient questions of racial hatred
and infinite cruelty?

The vanquished whisper hauntingly,

"Remember me."

"Remember me."

*German for masterpiece

I Wonder About the Trees: A Poem of 1st Lines From Robert Frost Poems Beginning with "I."

Bill Yarrow

I stole forth dimly in the dripping pause
I let myself in at the kitchen door
I went to turn the grass once after one
I had withdrawn in forest, and my song

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white
I didn't like the way he went away
I went to the physician to complain
I have wished the bird to fly away

I walked down alone Sunday after church
I turned to speak to God
I felt the chill of the meadow underfoot
I didn't make you know how glad I was

I had for my winter evening walk
I opened the door so my last look
I met a lady from the South who said,
"I never dared be radical when young.

I never happened to contrast
I slumbered with your poems upon my breast
I stayed the night for shelter at a farm."
I said to myself almost in prayer:

I farm a pasture where the boulders lie
I advocate a semi-revolution
I love to toy with the Platonic notion
I could be worse employed

I dwell in a lonely house I know
I often see flowers from a passing car
I would build my house of crystal
I wonder about the trees

Dreamscape

Tony Loveland

"Damn you!"
"Don't let her die!"
"Don't you fucking dare
        let her die!"
Screaming subliminally
Blinded and fueled by hatred
Cursing God's name in vain
        "Why?"
                "Why her?"
"Why must the innocent die?"
        "Answer me!"
"Answer me, God damn you!"
All questions   unanswered
All I can do
All that I am allowed to do
Is watch her life
                slip
                    from within
                                my
                                    grasp
So painful,
yet so soothing at the same time.
Her warm life's blood
Soaking into my clothes
Suctioning onto my skin
And there is not
one damn thing
I can do about it.
For we are isolated
Alone
All alone within this
hellish nightmare.

Don't Raise...

Angela Brooks

Don't raise your voice to me!
The power behind words hurts more
than any slap to the cheek.
So beat me if you want
syllables and broken phrases
batter my body as no fist ever could.

Pain is a four-letter word
in a world of abusive strangers.

I've Got Mad Style*

Paul Vollmer

Put your hands up, reach for the sky,
you know I got skills, I get ill and I'm a white guy.
I got mad style, I get buck-wild
I'm larger than life so I keep a low profile.
As I do my thing
I slide into class as the bell rings.
I don't roll with a gang, but I do have a crew.
What you gonna do if we step up to you?
You better check yourself like the old tires and kick it
You're a clown you belong in a circus, here's a ticket.
Fool, don't make me mad. I'm born to be bad
with the rough time that I had.
My pants are saggin', everyone's laggin'
behind. I'm just fine, but I'm not braggin'.
I'm not a Polack and I hate sauerkraut
Hell is where I'm livin'
but, positivity's what I'm about.

* Intended for an audience of rappers

Further Up the Beach

Ted Thompson

Meeting of earth and water,
Shore is communion
Of the elemental.
Think at first
Water with its flow
Of softness
With its lacy foam
Is feminine;
While the earth
In its obdurate solidarity,
In its silence
Facing constant babble
Is male.
Think again.
For water's
Insistent assault upon earth
Its constant imploring -
Is phallic;
While earth's coming dampness
Its yielding, grain by grain,
To the wave
Upon wave
Is female.
Think again. Again.
One foot in the sand,
Soaking the other,
Wading while dreaming
Of your matching
Element.
But Which?

Thanks Anyway

Gary Weinshenker

To walk through a doorway
And be halted abruptly
By a stranger of such beauty
Is always splendid.

First seen are the eyes
Which stir electrical currents
throughout
the body, beginning in the loins.
Then the luminous hair
Flowing downward,
as if from a waterfall,
Begging to be touched.
Later, perhaps seconds, maybe hours,
a downward glance does not
disappoint.
The lips so full, glistening as if just
wetted, parted ever so slightly
are all the inspiration needed.

My mind unable to fully cope,
my mouth opens to speak, but
continuously trips over the tongue that
has occupied it for so long.
Then my eyes see the large arm
around her perfect shoulders,
connected to the large man
whose glare pierces the skin.
A smile and goodbye.

Missed

Dojna Corzine

the leeway you gave me i'd never fit through
my veins quake from faking remembering you
your wayward focus kept me underground
to leave me your secret and give me no sound

Change of Clothes...

Keleigh Biggins

My mind wanders while I wait for them to call my name. The courtroom loses its feeling of bleak reality, and I recall how good Mother has been about all of this.

While I grew up, I always felt tension between Mother and me; we never really got along with each other. I guess it was a sort of mother-daughter conflict that kept us from being better friends.

Daddy, as a truck driver, was never home. In his fifties, Daddy had to work long and hard to support his two buy-crazy, spend-happy women. He led a hard, tired life, and he was literally driving himself sick. I've always thought he had more back problems than a mule.

And I suppose Mother and I blamed each other for his condition. I have always felt that she deliberately harassed Daddy while he was home to make him more tired when he finally left again. In my eyes it was her favorite sport to try and break him.

One day Daddy had come home looking so exhausted and completely wretched, I thought he might just lie down and die. I remember how he got out the whiskey and practically drained the whole bottle. I made Daddy lie on the couch so I could rub his head. He always had these terrible migraine headaches; he said it was as if God himself was inside his head pounding with a sledgehammer.

I hadn't been at it very long when Mother came home. She started screamin' and yellin' that Daddy was a no-good drunk, and I was just tryin' to get him to buy me more "stupid, slutty clothing that I got no business even wearing."

Mother threw a book at my head, but I ducked and it hit Daddy instead. I've never seen him madder—honest to God. He was screamin' and carryin' on, raising all heck. I just took off upstairs and hid in my bedroom.

It wasn't long after that when Daddy left for good. He always said he was gonna leave some day. He said he was much too old to put up with our fussin' and complainin'. Mother would always just cackle a bit and ridicule him. She said she had heard that all before.

Daddy would always say that it was God's own will that we be left to each other. He said we'd end up both dead or finally friends. I guess that time he was serious 'cause he never came home again.

A few months passed, and I noticed a change in Mother. She became real quiet,all the time like a mouse. And she stopped shopping altogether. Then she started stayin' home a lot and cookin' for me and stuff like that. We became civil towards each other if not exactly friends. So I guess I shouldn't have been surprised when she was so good about my accident.

I came home with this real fancy-pants lawyer that I accidentally hit. I hadn't been paying attention to where I was driving, and I smashed into his shiny BMW. He was carryin' on to my mother about how his suit alone cost more than my car. He said he'd sue us for all we had.

I was cowerin' in my chair, waitin' for Mother to start screamin' at me. But she just sort of smiled and told him to get his fancy-ass out of our house. He said he'd see us in court, but Mother just smiled.

After he left, I looked at Mother. I thought she'll start yellin' for sure now. But she just told me to sit down and explain what happened. Mother said she loved me, that I was her God-given daughter and she'd stand by me in court. I swear my knees were tremblin', and I just started to bawl.

I heard my name called - it was time for me to face that God-awful, sleezy lawyer. I didn't think I could do it, but Mother smiled and squeezed my hand. As I walked toward the judge, I glanced back at Mom, and it occurred to me that she wasn't so bad after all. Maybe all the time Mom and I were buyin' new clothes, we were really tryin' to buy new selves. I guess we finally realized that what we wanted was already in our closets.

Ever

Dojna Corzine

quarter moons, i roll my tongue
shifting eyes to skies you wrung
curled in clover, let me live
unrisen with the sleep you give

Drown

Angela Brooks

Swirling confusion
Washed under water
    only to resurface grasping
        waves folding over my head
for the third time
        A blue-green house shelter
    soft sanctuary
    coaxing me down its depths.
    Life is beautiful now.

I Am Amazed

Lorraine Johnson

I am amazed
at the beauty of a room
that holds passionate memories
of us.
I am on the blanket
that covers the carpet
in the room that is filled with so much beauty -
on the walls,
every wall,
is a painting
a creation of yours -
A vase of flowers
or a burst of multicolors
screaming out in black
that Jesus was a hippie.
He lights candles
as you kiss my lips
as we listen to nature
sounds of rain and springtime,
sunlight and summertime,
in the beautiful room that surrounds us.
I have found a meaning for life,
a secret so bizarre and so wonderful,
a passion so wild and untamed
in the beautiful room
in your (and his) beautiful world

Temptress Eyes

Steve Cutter

Heaven help the wayward soul
That happens on to you.
His heart will pound, and passions rise
As gazing into temptress eyes
All waking thought turns to the night
He tastes your white-hot lover's light.

He wrestles with dilemma
And ponders what to do.
To break the oath, his holy vow,
And rush to her somewhere, somehow?
Or shun the truth, avoid desire,
And flee the burning, lustful fire?

But madness has him all now;
He dreams of her each night.
He's felt her lips, caressed her hair;
He's kissed her skin in places where
He can't forget. He never will.
Her lure has him bound to her still.

But over time the image dimmed
And faded from his dreams.
So much to lose and none to gain,
He would not cause his loved ones pain.

Tension

Dojna Corzine

...and drinking drops were left in madness
kissed before the moon eclipsed and cracked the
ceiling falling blisters soft and sweet with what
you missed.

Liberation
Keleigh Biggins

Finally, my stomach muscles may unclench.
The tension at last is relieved.
Almost nonexistant, but there.
A trembling softness.
I've found my voice.
Outpouring.
Can.
I
I think
Why must I?
Will no one anwer?
Mixed emotions, reluctance.
The question lingers in silence.
My opinions seem unwilling to exit.
Debate and ideas, different thoughts.

LIBERATION

The Lilies...
Angela Brooks

The lilies in the soul room have been painted light
amidst the sepia tones they bloom
casting rays of white
bouncing off the greys and browns
hues of hopeless history...

Million Dollar Jackpot Ticket in My Pocket
Marianne Nowak

how lucky i am to have you
how slow I am to realize you
utilize you and appreciate you
dance with you

how quick I am to criticize
to mistrust you, and take you for granted
when I should hold you and console
you raise you up and extol you

Downline
Dojna Corzine

WHY DOESN'T THIS EVER CLIMB DOWN TO AN ENDING?
WHY DON'T WE CALL SENSELESS THIS ENDLESS PRETENDING?
brought me to daylight before i was born
held me to promises - i wasn't warned

Ghost-girl

Dojna Corzine

lunchtime on monday you're
scared to look up at me
reeling impatience and
not knowing anything
thinking of drive-ins
words that were written and
lost in a basement of
unwanted reasoning
say what i want to
it won't get me anything
only thing changeless
in heaven and here with me
seven words reading i'm
wishing for meaning
i hope this will stop before
i give you everything
two weeks from now
and this is behind me
and closed up in notebooks
it's you that i'm missing

Isolated From Society

Crista Fabrycki

Isolated from society
Standing at the door
Your screaming soul scarcely weeping
Simply wanting more

Wishing days of love and life
Dwelling on your past
Competing with your inner strife
Heartache must not last

Look at all the joyous people
Laugh and dance and play
Your emotions of hostility
Must be swept away

A world of wonders wasted
Because of selfish cries
You must go on, not look back
And never close your eyes

Slip quickly through the door
To a life of fresh new fate
Isolation will occur no more
If you cease one feeling: hate.

Treasures Lost

Steve Cutter

The fiery sun itself,
In all its light and brilliance,
Pales in contrast to your air.
The mighty winds of storms
That howl and beat the earth
Are but breezes in your hair.

A calm, still pond at sunset
Is but a fragment of the beauty
That your spirit holds.
And yes, the ocean is too shallow,
It could never hold the love let loose
From your soul as it unfolds.

And I wonder, when did I lose
Sight of the treasure
That was mine?
How could I take it for granted
These glorious gifts
That men have searched for throughout time?

What could cause a person
To shun the light and breeze, the beauty and love
That you so freely gave?
And opt for darkened loneness,
(A still and rancid air)
And see not ever treasure,
but imperfection everywhere?

My blindness ruined our love at last.

Now, banished to this fetid room
I grope and claw through cloudy gloom,
But sense the light and freshened air.
I tear the shackles from my heart,
And emerging I declare:
"I see you now, I feel you there!"
Then looking round
I am aware
That all I've left is me.
For your love has left, you see.

The Green Stars...

Lorraine Johnson

The green stars glow in the darkness.
Were we out in the night?
Or were we in the galaxy
behind your bedroom door?
I could feel you,
your overwhelming power
that controlled me completely
under the green stars
I could hear the music,
the music that played over and over as a background
for our lust -
under the green stars,
my hands were securely locked
around the table with the clock
as you violently moved me on the floor,
under the green stars
feelings of passion
overcame me,
overcame you,
as we welcomed the darkness,
welcomed the deep meaning of a candle in the darkness,
a cigarette after sex
a million glowing green stars shining in the night,
dancing around the walls
in an orbit of complete ecstasy

Unreal

Janine Passehl

reality's grasp
has loosened its grip
as the tenderness of
imagination
embraces me
craving that which
has yet been eluded,
and lost in the
illusion of
intimacy

Treadmill

Dojna Corzine

you in my head live noiseless
creating no clamor to bother the quiet
knocking down nothing
though i throw thoughts unbalanced
to help you along
your saying never expected
ever taking up the same break of sidewalk
catching nothing unforeseen
though i've dismissed all guard

Is This My lot?

Steve Cutter

Lonesome, gnarled and twisted limbs,
Wincing at the gentle breeze
That rips the bark and pulls the leaves
From once a mighty power.

Tangled, dried and blackened sticks,
Howling at the wondrous rain
That sears the flesh in knots of pain -
Alas, the forests' father.

Now harken back to wishful days,
When dreams of grandest fashion
Fed his roots with heated passion
To become and strive and feel.

But dreams grew still with withered age.
Bitterness crept strong and dark.
"Is this my lot; My life a lark;
Am I simply just a tree?"

So, waiting on the hewer's axe
To free him from his barren earth
And glow with heat in loggers hearth,
Wretched limbs are done with life.

Had I...

Steve Cutter

Had I danced one dance,
or held your hand
and walked beneath the moon;
Had I touched your heart
with mine one time,
would you still be leaving soon?

Had I gazed one gaze
of truth and love,
or wiped away your tears;
Had I heard your pleas
to join as one,
would you stay through coming years?

Had I loved your love
as though I should,
or bared to you my soul;
Had I given you
my very best,
would you still feel pressed to go?

Had I fought one fight
within myself,
and beaten back my pride;
Had I slayed the beast
that hurts you so,
would you still remain my bride?

Had I thought one thought
beyond my own,
or hearkened to your pain;
Had I kissed away
a tiring day,
would you then be mine again?

Had I shed one tear
and let you near,
I'd be holding you at night;
Had I one more life
to live again,
I would surely love you right.

I Have Seen Him

Lorraine Johnson

I have seen him
born in a dream,
breathing the air of reality,
not only just an image
to come alive with the darkness,
hitching a ride on the moon;
he is my reality,
he is my truth,
he will come
in the hours of my death like sleep,
in the dawning of a brand-new meaning;
and his mind
speaks of perfection,
perfection in the art
of double existence

The sun
seems to light up the clouds
with an electrical current,
that fills them with such brightness,
as they move slowly
in white puffs
in the heavenly blue sky

Phantom

Janine Passehl

slow summer evenings
suffocate lingering emotions,
stifle sentiments of regret
as i move
irresolutely through a
mystical world of
flickering light,
dancing shadows.
i am ominous,
anonymous
moaning and sighing
for life.

Pronouncement Day

Steve Cutter

A child lies lone in silent fear
As harsh words tug and rip his ear,
And tell their tales of loss.
He gropes for words in hopeful prayer
To halt the madness, end despair,
And rid him of his cross.

So did this youngster live his life,
Uncertain if he'd feel the strife
His parents could impart.
To wonder for so many years
and fight back 'gainst the bitter tears,
Grew armor 'round his heart.

And when pronouncement day did come
His very soul grew coldly numb
And shriveled as to hide.
"No light of day shall pierce this shield,
No power shall one ever wield
To break these walls inside."

Then, later in the nighttime still,
With anger and a strengthened will,
He vowed to never cry.
The answer was so bright and clear:
Just never let another near
Enough to tell a lie.

What I Reclaim

Dojna Corzine

covering my footprints and speaking to mirrors
alone in this music my head's all the clearer
the treasure of shapes of the lightrays you break
are sketched by my eyes as i word my escape

Wronging Fate

Dojna Corzine

never your season
twice fallen and smaller
all rings from the spiders
that crawl on your water
the sunsetting leaves you
with symptoms of sanity
and covers your words
with the fear you name vanity

Letter to the Enemy

Margo Winder

Cancer
I knew it even before
it came out of his mouth.
He's drawing diagrams
on the back of a
breast-feeding pamphlet.

Is he being sarcastic?

Can't even understand
what he's saying.
I knew I should have gone
to an American.

Left his office
holding death's hand.
Who said your loved ones
feel what you do?

I'm the one in the box
with the cheap satin lining.
You just peer in.
You can leave
whenever you want.

I don't need this.

See,
There's too much
to do.

I'm not going anywhere
with you.

Secret Getaway

Crista Fabrycki

Here I am at Mag's again. It has been two days since I've come here. I'm feeling better. My name is Kari Klinston. During the day I go to the local college, and in the evenings I like to come to this family restaurant to study. This has basically been my life since Jay broke up with me a year ago - with the exception of the last two days.

Jay cheated on me. When I gave him an ultimatum: her or me, he picked her and left. Jay wasn't the first to desert me. I always thought Marky was the first. Now I know he's the last.

I saw Marky for the first time in ten years two days ago.

"Do you come to family restaurants often by yourself?" he had asked.

I had marked the spot in my Biology book with my pencil where I had stopped reading for what turned out to be the rest of the evening and looked up.

"Do I know you?"

"There once was a little boy and a little girl who used to run across a long tree trunk bridge over a creek to a secret getaway in the woods. Our own little private home away from the big bad homes of reality."

I could feel my eyes widen and a twisted smile of excitement cover my face. "Marky! Oh my gosh! Is it really you? I haven't seen you in ten years. Where have you been? What have you been up to? How did you recognize me? No offense, but I wouldn't have known it was you if I saw you out on the street, but now I see, yeah it's you. Oh my gosh." I must have said it all in ten seconds, I was talking so fast.

"Slow down, Kar. Mind if I join you?"

As a welcome I flipped over the coffee cup across from mine and poured him some coffee from the pot the waitress had left for me. "You drink coffee, I hope."

"Yeah, sure. You must drink quite a bit seeing as you have your own pot.

"Oh yeah, well, they all know me here. I come in just about every night. As pathetic as it may sound, at my age I'm a regular here at Mag's."

My eyes must have shone as I looked into Marky's. I couldn't believe I was sitting here with my old childhood friend who had disappeared so suddenly when we were both ten years old. I had convinced myself that he must be dead, but I guess that was a naive belief since I never actually went out to search for him.

I could not help noticing the way his muscular arms filled his T-shirt sleeves. I felt more than guilty as I imagined for a few quick seconds what it would be like to have my childhood friend on top of me.

"I just can't get over the fact that you're sitting here in front of me. It's amazing that you recognized me after all these years."

"Well, Kar, I have a confession to make," Marky responded. "I didn't know it was you right away. I was checking out how hot you looked."

Marky blushed immediately. "Well, I mean...uh, I thought you looked real pretty, so intent on your book and all," he stammered, "and then I noticed the necklace with your sister's picture on it. It was the necklace that made me realize you were you."

So you think I'm hot, I tried to resist thinking as my hand involuntarily brushed over my necklace. "You look different, too, Marky."

"Uh, it's Mark now." He must have captured my bewildered expression. He continued, "but you can still call me Marky. I guess it wouldn't seem right any other way, huh?"

I nodded, and he smiled a broad grin. His full lips looked beautiful. It's funny - I seemed to remember his lips, even at ten years old, as full and beautiful. Maybe that was about the time when I was starting to become influenced by hormones - starting to notice the little boys as more than just buddies. I couldn't remember for sure.

We drank coffee and talked for three hours. In the time I didn't learn much about Marky's present life. He seemed hesitant to talk about himself. If I asked him a question, he answered, but he wouldn't offer any information. When I mentioned my family, he nodded his head, politely smiling, and said that it was nice to hear they were well, or something like that. But I could tell he wasn't truly interested. I thought I might have noticed him scowling, but I disregarded the thought at the time.

He didn't mention his family.

I did find out that he went to a high school about an hour away from my town. But he dropped out. He's working at a gas station. He stopped in Mag's to grab a bite to eat before going to his friend George's apartment. George also lives in my town, but I don't know him.

I didn't pry too much; I didn't want to make him feel uncomfortable. He seemed to love talking about the past, and I was content with that, too. We laughed a lot over old times. His eyes glowed, and his smile didn't seem to cease much when we were reminiscing about the fun times we had shared together. For the most part, I felt comfortable with him. I thought we were sharing except for a couple times when he seemed to be by himself - like when I mentioned how our parents used to sit in the front lawn and drink beers together. He smiled - that polite smile again - and agreed, but this time his grin was chilling. He seemed isolated in his own thoughts. I told him that after he moved, my dad joined Alcoholics Anonymous.

"My dad's fine now," I said.

I thought he'd be happy for my father, but he didn't say anything. He only stared at me. I wondered what he was thinking.

When I changed the subject to talk a bit about our secret getaway, he seemed sincere again. We even talked a bit about how we used to escape from our drunken fathers and our weak, dominated mothers to the secret getaway in the woods.

"Remember how we used to comfort each other?" Marky asked in a quiet voice. "We used to think a hug and a game of make-believe could solve anything."

I did remember.

For the most part, we had a nice conversation. I could not help feeling attracted to Marky and wondered if he felt the same or if he still thought of me as the little girl next door. At midnight I concluded that I should get home - it wasn't a school night, but it was getting late. Before I got up to leave, I said, "Wait, one more memory, Marky. Remember that time when we climbed up the tree in my front yard that stands over the sidewalk? And then we brought up those two buckets of water by attaching them to ropes and leveraging them up? And you almost fell out of the tree, but I caught you. And we snapped off branches from the tree to cover ourselves. Do you remember what happened next, Marky?"

Marky answered in an almost sad tone. I noticed his sudden change in expression even though he tried to hide it with a laugh. He said, "And Lisa from down the street walked by on the sidewalk, and we drenched her."

Interrupting, anxious to share the ending with Marky, I concluded, "and she screamed up to us even though she couldn't see us, 'I know it's you up there, Kari and Marky. You'd better come down so I can pour some water on you. It's not fair any other way!'"

I began laughing uncontrollably, and Marky started chuckling too. I didn't realize the irony at the time. I felt that we were laughing in the family restaurant just as we had done the same in the tree ten years earlier.

"She always wanted to be accepted by us," I said. "Do you know what ever happened to her?"

Marky stopped laughing. "She had my child."

I also stopped laughing. I got up out of the booth, threw a dollar tip on the table, and said, "Oh, so I guess she was finally accepted by one of us, huh?"

I had meant for my comment to be a joke - a joke just like the ones we used to share - but instead the words sounded spiteful. I tried to sound normal, sweet, "It was great seeing you, Marky," and started to walk away, Bio book in hand. I was walking through the glass restaurant door that said "Welcome to Mag's" in red script letters when he caught up with me.

"Listen, my buddy, George, is having a party tomorrow night. Why don't you come?"

I was ready to say, "I don't think I can make it," but then thought, can't make it? I haven't been to a party since Jay and I broke up. If I don't go, I'll just sit here instead. "Okay. You going to pick me up? I know you know where I live."

Marky hesitated, "Yeah, nine o'clock sound okay?"

At nine o'clock last night I had stood waiting at the door. I had meant to ask my parents why Marky and his family had left ten years ago. That certainly would not have been the first time I had asked that question, but it would have been the first time in a long time. But I never

got to it because I spent Saturday at Mag's reading and when I got home, my parents were out of the house.

I stood by the door until 9:15 and then figured I was being stood up. It wouldn't be the first time. I looked at my reflection in the mirror by the door. Long, curly bronze hair, clear complexion, decent body - but no luck with guys. I was walking to my desk to get my Bio book when the phone rang. Marky said he was having car problems and asked if I could meet him at the party. I agreed, and he gave me directions.

I got to the apartment and found Marky. He obviously was already drunk as he slurred, "Heyya, Kar." I didn't mind that he had been drinking and figured his insobriety was his reason for not picking me up. I was glad he was responsible. "Can I get ya a beer, Kar?"

"Yeah, sure."

During the first part of the evening, I met a lot of people and had some fun. I was actually glad to be someplace besides Mag's. Music was playing, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. I looked around for Lisa, but I didn't see anyone who looked like her. She had also moved out of the neighborhood.

I met George. I introduced myself, and he said, "Oh, so you're the Kari from the childhood neighborhood. I've heard a lot about you over the years. To tell you the truth, I'm surprised to see you here."

"Yeah, isn't it weird? I just happened to bump into Marky yesterday."

"Uh, yeah." George seemed strained like he didn't know what else to say. I could understand that because I didn't know what else to say either.

"So you knew Lisa?" He stumbled on his words.

"Yes, how is she?"

George's eyebrows moved toward each other.

"She's dead. Died a month ago."

"Oh, my gosh. I'm so sorry to hear that. How did she die?"

"Car accident."

"Oh. That must have been devastating. Were she and Marky still dating?"

"No, they had broken up."

Marky interrupted by tapping me on the shoulder to dance. I was relieved; I felt uncomfortable talking with George.

"It was nice meeting you, George," I politely said.

A slow song was playing, and there were a few other couples in the living room dancing. I'd probably had a few too many to drink because after a few dances when Marky led me into a bedroom, I followed.

Marky lowered me down onto the bed. "I think I'm in love with you." He pressed his lips hard against mine.

I had never felt a more powerful kiss. We embraced with passion as he slipped his tongue in and out of my mouth. He licked my lips just like he used to lick his favorite lollypops - wild cherry Life Savor pops - when we were little.

And then I remembered; he was never satisfied only licking the pop; he always bit the candy, chomped it, and finished it quickly.

Was this how it had been with Lisa? I suddenly grew angry. I pushed him away. "Do you have some kind of sick goal - see how many deserted childhood friends you can screw in your adult life? Why'd you leave ten years ago and never say goodbye? Never find me again? I lost my best friend and now you're back, but I won't let you leave me like you apparently left Lisa. God damn you!"

I wondered if I was being too melodramatic. The alcohol was definitely affecting me. I rolled over on my stomach, tears flowing from my eyes. I hadn't cried since Jay left me. I wanted to go to sleep. I found myself wishing I had never seen Marky.

He spoke quietly. "My dad hung himself in the hall closet ten years ago. I found him. Your parents knew. All the adults knew, but I guess that news wasn't thought suitable for ten year olds, huh? But let's think about it. Why would your father have told you? Then he might as well have admitted he was the cause."

I turned my head and saw the same chilling grin that I had seen at Mag's. I wanted to run. I didn't want to hear the end. I wanted to wake up from the nightmare, cozy in my bed at home. But I couldn't leave. He was once my best friend. He was opening up to me.

I turned over onto my back and looked into his

eyes. He didn't see me.

"I was going to get the picnic basket from the closet; we had planned to go to the secret getaway. Remember? We always used to sneak food from our kitchens. For some reason I still got the picnic basket. That's the last thing I remember, holding the picnic basket and looking at my father."

"I was in the hospital for a long time after that. They tell me that for a month I didn't talk. I was waiting for you to come in. We were supposed to have a picnic." His voice got louder, almost violent. He no longer sounded calm. "If I hadn't been getting the basket for you, I wouldn't have seen him."

I was shocked, and I felt guilty, and I was mad at my parents. I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say anything. I had asked my parents more than once when Marky and his family were coming back, and they had always been vague.

Within a month, though, the Shroer's furniture had been moved out, and a new girl my age moved into Marky's house. I began playing with her. I even took her to the secret getaway. I had termed Marky a betrayer and soon stopped asking about him.

"You never came, and eventually I got well." His voice was calm again. "I guess I know it's not your fault - you didn't know, your parents didn't tell you - but I still blame you. You didn't come, and I needed you."

"I'm so sorry, Marky. Please forgive me," I whined like a little girl. I sat up, moved forward, and placed my arms around his shoulders to hug him.

Marky didn't seem to hear my apology; he grabbed both of my arms and shook me. His voice was harsh. "You stupid bitch! You think a hug can make everything all better just like your hugs used to? You never did anything to find out what happened. Don't think about accusing me of deserting my baby like my dad deserted me. I don't desert people like you and my dad deserted me!"

I cried. I needed a hug. I needed to be taken away from him. He held my arms tightly. I screamed, but he put his left hand over my mouth.

He yelled, "I waited for you! You were the only one I could talk to! You never came! I was there for you when your sister died!"

I could hear the music in the other room. I could hear people laughing. Couldn't anyone hear my childhood friend screaming in his adult voice?

A knock at the door. Somehow I recognized the voice. I had quickly sobered up. It was George. "Is everything all right in there?"

Marky jumped back, startled. He was sitting up and called out in a calm voice, "Yeah, everything's fine."

I was still crying. He looked questioningly at me but didn't say anything. I slithered off the bed. I said, "Good bye, Mark," and ran from the room.

I have no doubt that the people at the party were staring. George had said something as I came out of the bedroom, but I couldn't hear him.

I had stopped running to ask him one question: "What happened to Lisa and Marky's baby?"

"What baby?"

I ran all the way to the car.

So here I am at Mag's again. My Bio book sits at my side. I think I might get in touch with George to get Mrs. Shroer's phone number. I am convinced Mark needs help.

Perhaps I will call her tomorrow. Or wait - not tomorrow, I have my Bio test tomorrow. Maybe I will try to call her sometime this week.

Commit Me...

Angela Brooks

Commit me in your solitude
upon the astral planes in your mind.
A single thought
in memory
Florescence outlined.
I am the only one.

Downstairs

Dojna Corzine

broken-boned and you stand still
daring me to give your fill
and take my story to the end
and knock you down to brick again
how'd your promise come to this?
with moondown glance i chance a kiss
but you keep close to trace my tracks
a smile and lies to run me back

Walking in the Fog at Night

Janine Passehl

walking in the fog
on a starless night -
true dimensions are
veiled in the
whispering
shadows of mist -
memories stride beside me as
hand in hand
we stroll along a crooked
path of disillusionment,
believing in the
enchantment
of ghostly apparitions which
swirl and
surround,
grasp and
envelop us with
their velvety touch -
soft and tender.
and when the fog
dissipates,
a nocturnal beauty
emerges and
hand in hand
with useless memories
i watch a
new moon rise.

Euterpe Visits

Ted Thompson

A note
Which is
A glimmer
Flashes in inner eye
Unformed
Insubstantial
Asking for words.
Trying to grant
The boon,
Pen scratches,
Taps on teeth,
And slowly
Essence
Finds
Existence.

The poet discovers
Or recovers
Ideas
Words
Ideas
Words
In links of chaos,
Fabricates form
Until something emerges
Just vaguely in harmony
With flute quaver
Fading from far Helicon.

The Weather...

JoLynn Holt

I

The weather couldn't really be described as nice. Dreary was more like it. It had threatened rain all day but had never come through. Now a few gusts of wind were rising as daylight faded into darkness.

Ruth was alone in the big house. She never really minded when her parents left her alone. There was always something interesting to do when she was left to her own devices. It was fun to make some new concoction in the kitchen and try it out on her parents later, and she always enjoyed looking through the old scrapbooks or reading from the many volumes in the family library. Of course, television was generally number one on the list of things to do. It required so little effort, and somehow tonight she just didn't want to do anything that required effort. She planned a quiet night in front of the TV. She did wish, however, that she didn't live so far from town. It would have been nice to have a friend over on this dismal night.

Just then, Grandma rubbed against her leg. Grandma was her calico cat. Ruth had loved her real grandmother very much and when she died two years ago, Ruth's mother tried to comfort her a little by giving her a kitten. Now the love and affection her grandmother had given her lived on in Grandma, the cat. It was fun to see the odd look on people's faces when she called, "Grandma! Here, Grandma, come here, girl!" In fact, when snobby old Aunt Alice came to stay the night shortly after Grandmother had passed away and heard Ruth walking through the house calling for Grandma, she nearly passed out. Later she told Ruth's mother that it "certainly was not in Ruth's best interest to entertain the idea that her cat was Grandma." What an idea! Of course, Ruth never did think the cat "was" Grandmother. She just wanted to remember her grandmother, and naming her cat Grandma seemed like a good way to do it.

Ruth gently picked up the cat, and the two of them went into the kitchen to get cookies and milk before going upstairs to Ruth's bedroom and settling in to watch Friday Night at the Movies. The wind was really picking up. It was starting to wail against the glass, and the trees were beginning a reluctant and eerie dance in the path of the store. Suddenly there was a crash outside in the darkness.

"What do you think that was, Grandma?' Ruth asked. "Maybe we better investigate." She went to the back door and cautiously turned on the porch light. There was the culprit - a loose garbage can gyrating across the back yard. "Nothing to worry about. Everything's fine," she said stroking the cat, "but maybe we better make sure all the doors are locked just in case. You can never be too careful." That was a phrase her mother used often, and it gave Ruth the shivers to think that maybe she used it for a good reason.

Everything looked to be secure as Ruth climbed the stairs to her corner bedroom with Grandma in pursuit.

"I wish I had asked Jackie to come over! I hate being alone on a stormy night!" she lamented, but Grandma hopped onto a chair and seemed contented enough so Ruth resigned herself to the chair as well. Lifting the cat onto her lap, she flicked on the TV with her remote and struggled to put her concerns behind her. "We're going to be fine, Grandma. Don't you worry."

The house was creaking and popping like some houses do, making house complaints. It was hard to distinguish between a harmless protest and what might be someone creeping around the house or maybe even trying to get in. Ruth feigned a carefree attitude, mostly to fool herself, but in truth she was nervous and kept an ear open for any unusual sounds.

Then she heard a strange, steady, pounding sound coming from someplace downstairs. She quickly turned down the volume on the television and strained to determine the source of the sound. There it was again - it was coming from the kitchen. Someone was trying the kitchen door. Thoughts raced through her mind. Had she locked the kitchen door...yes, it was locked. Should she call the police....What if it was her imagination? She would make such a big fool of herself. She didn't know what to do.

It was raining now. Thunder rumbled, and lightening flashed behind the clouds. It was the kind of rain that seems as if the heavens have opened and the gods are pouring out huge buckets of water. Ruth was relieved

to hear the steady torrent. "If someone is out there in this rain, I'll bet they give up and go away," she said hopefully.

Suddenly, Grandma lifted her head and perked her ears. Then she bolted out of the room and down the stairs. She was startled by something, and now Ruth could hear it too. Whoever had been in the backyard was now trying to open the front door. To her surprise the outsider started pounding on the door and ringing the doorbell. He must know she's home alone, and once she opend the door he would...she was too frightened to think about that now. Slowly, she started to creep from her room. There was no doubt now - she must call for help. She wanted to hurry, but the fear that gripped her would not free its icy hand long enough for her to move freely. Her parents' room had a phone and a view of the door, and it was just across the hall. She made her way cautiously.

With a small degree of relief, Ruth reached for the receiver of the phone and dialed 911. Someone quickly answered. "Police Department. May I help you?"

"Yes," she whispered, "someone is trying to break into my house. Please help me!"

"Don't worry, Miss, someone is on their way. Can you give me your address?"

Ruth's heart was pounding so loudly that she was afraid the operator would not be able to hear her instructions above its throbbing. Carefully she choked out her address and remained on the line as the operator tried to assure her that all would be well. Cautiously she edged toward the window; the operator wanted to know if she could see her assailant. She put her trembling hand forward and gently drew aside the curtain. Slowly and discreetly, she peered out. A new wave of terror clutched at her throat. There he was! Through the rain-blanketed window she could make out the shape of a man, a large man, probing a half hidden front window.

The sound of shattering glass filled all the recesses of her mind with the horrifying realization that he was in.

II

...Bob and Irene Johnson were trying to enjoy a pleasant evening alone. The plans had been dinner and a movie, but as the weather became nore and more fierce, their thoughts kept turning toward their young daughter who was home alone.

"Ruth has always been afraid of thunderstorms!" Irene announced. "I think we should go home and forget about the movie."

"No, let's just give her a call. I'm sure she's all right." Bob was protesting a little even though he knew his wife was right. Anyway, worry had a way of ruining a perfectly good evening.

Irene was beginning to get that pinched, worried look, so before she could say anything more, Bob stood up.

"Okay, honey, forget the phone call. I'll go get the car. You can pay the bill and meet me in front of the restaurant in a couple of minutes."

In no time at all, Irene was climbing into their green Dodge Caravan. The car was beautiful, and it still had that "new car" smell. She felt comfortable and relieved to be heading home.

Bob, too, was glad to be going home, for the weather steadily worsened. They enjoyed a pleasant conversation, their worries drifting away from their immediate situation.

They were almost home when without warning, the car began to sputter. Bob coaxed it to the side of the road where it died completely. The gasoline gauge registered empty.

"I can't believe it! It would have to happen on a night like this!" Bob said disgustedly. "Well, I guess it could be worse. At least we're only a block from home." He left his wife in the car and reluctantly stepped out into a torrential downpour. Being soaked to the skin within minutes, he put his head down and quickened his step. "What a stroke of bad luck!" he muttered to himself, and with every step he became more and more irritated.

Finally he was home. Turning up the driveway, he reached into his coat pocket for the keys. With dismay he cursed his intolerable luck. In his haste he must have forgotten them. Surely Ruth would have left the back

door open as it was seldom locked until everyone was home safe and sound.

He hastened to the rear of the house only to find that the door was locked tight. In desperation he turned the handle and beat on the door, but he couldn't arouse his daughter.

"I can't believe it!" he mumbled under his breath. "She's probably got the television blaring and can't hear a thing!" He stomped around to the front door, his temper flaring. Of course, it was also locked, so he pounded and rang the doorbell, but there was no answer. "I'll give that girl a piece of my mind when I get hold of her!" he threatened, and he roared, "Ruutthh! Leet mee iinn!" His cry was lost in the screams of the storm. This had to be the worst night of his life. He was soaked and shivering and as angry as he could ever remember being. He was quite beyond reason as he stepped off the front porch and over to the living room window. It was partially protected by a large pine tree. Yes, this was the window to open. The small side pane would not be too expensive to replace. He picked up a rock that looked to be just right for breaking glass , and with a firm hand, he hit a steady blow. The glass shattered easily, and he slipped his hand through the jagged breach and released the lock.

With his hand on the frame, he steadily raised the window and was about to climb inside when he saw the pulsing lights and heard the scream of police cars coming in his direction.

"I wonder what the excitement is about," he mused.

How Did This Come About?

Margo Winder

How did this come about
Between this man,
this woman,
this love?
A child conceived,
Oh, world abound
Hush child
Don't cry
Walk, here,
I'll hold your hand

Broken heart, happy heart
School, Little League, proms
Jobs, marriage

Oh, parenting
Now this child
To a parent gray
Walk, here,
I'll hold your hand

I'm Losing Myself

Angela Brooks

I'm losing myself
renouncing reality
between half-empty and half-full
thoughts create a place where I can find
mercy from the emotional anarchy.

Desires and moody dreamscapes turn
round and round in
a divine spin cycle
that stops at half-dry and half-wet
only I can wring myself out from the inside
purging wash and wear
nightmares to try and start at the beginning
of a process with no end.

Leonard and Philomena

Nancy Fischer

In 1916, Philomena was graduated from St. Lucina's High School and started working as a legal stenographer in an office downtown. Ann and Marie looked forward each evening to seeing her return from work wearing a smart, dark suit. Young men, some clad in military uniforms of World War I, would come by and ask Philomena to go walking with them. On the few occasions when she agreed to go, she insisted that her younger sister and her sister's friend accompany them.

One Monday evening in the summer of 1917, Philomena came home from work looking more beautiful than ever. Her eyes sparkled, her face glowed. She announced to her parents that she would not be eating dinner at home because a gentleman, the son of one of the lawyers she worked for, was taking her to dine. Marie and Ann looked out of Philomena's bedroom window awaiting the arrival of the gentleman while Philomena slipped into a silk dress. As she ran a brush through her thick, dark hair, Ann and Marie jumped up and down saying, "He's here, he's here!"

"Shhh!" Philomena said. "You must behave like young ladies."

"Look what a shiny car he has!" Ann cried out.

"And he's so handsome and wears fine clothes," Marie shouted. "Is it okay if we go down to open the door?"

"Shhhh! Yes, but remember. Quietly. Young ladies. He's a lawyer, and he's a lieutenant in the Army."

As the two little girls walked softly down the stairs, Marie whispered, "I wonder if he looks as good close up."

"How could he not?" Ann whispered back. "He's so handsome."

"His teeth could be brown, and he could have grease spots on his tie."

"Or maybe pimples?" Ann giggled. Marie giggled too.

They contained their excitement at the front door and opened it immediately when the doorbell rang.

"Hello." The gentleman smiled, revealing strong, white teeth in a flawless face over an immaculate tie.

A slightly deeper-than-usual voice came from behind the girls. "How do you do. I am Guido Montini."

Marie could tell her father was making an effort to speak his best, unaccented English as he extended his right hand. Marie's mother watched from the shadows, unseen.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, sir." The gentleman's voice was deep and rich. He grasped the extended hand. "Phil has spoken of you. I am Leonard Silverman."

"Seelvairmon?" Guido pulled his hand away.

"That is correct," the gentleman answered, overlooking the welcoming hand's retraction.

Philomena glided down the stairs and took Leonard's arm. "I see you and my father have met. You must meet my sister, Marie, and her friend, Ann."

The girls hoped they would be invited to accompany Philomena and her gentleman but were left peering through the window as Leonard opened the car door and gently held Philomena's arm as she slid into the passenger seat.

"He is a Muerte Christo," Marie's mother stormed. "How could she turn her back on all that she has been taught?"

"Now, now," the father replied, "she is only going to dinner with him."

"Did you see how they look at each other? It is the look of two people who will be eating dinner together for the rest of their lives."

Ann and Marie retreated to Marie's bedroom as the disapproving parents raged. "Muerte Christo?" Ann asked. "Murderer of Christ? What does that mean? How could that handsome gentleman have killed Jesus? We learned in school that He was killed almost 2000 years ago, and I don't think the gentleman is more than twenty-five, and he seems so nice."

"Don't you know what Muerte Christo means?" Marie asked. "That's what they call Jews. Leonard Silverman must be a Jew."

"But he didn't look or act like the Jews on Maxwell Street."

"He sure didn't. He makes the boys Mama wants Philomena to go with look like snotty-nosed little kids."

Each evening that week, Leonard called for Philomena, and they went somewhere together. On Saturday when Philomena did not work, Leonard called for her before noon. They did not return that evening. On Sunday morning, 2nd Lieutenant and Mrs. Silverman announced to the Montini family that they had been wed the previous day by a Justice of the Peace at City Hall. Leonard helped Philomena gather clothes and personal belongings, and soon they were gone. Angelina Montini took to her bed claiming every ailment known to man and a few of her own invention. Guido bathed his distraught wife's head with cool cloths. Marie dressed to attend the Children's Mass. When the doorbell rang, she dashed out the front door whooping to Ann and her brother, Ernie, "Wait till you hear what happened!"

On the way to Mass, the three talked excitedly about Philomena's elopement, writhed with impatience during Mass, ignoring the nuns' silent signals of disapproval, and resumed their discussion on the church steps. When they reached Marie's house, a car was parked in front. From within the house, angry voices rumbled like thunder and crackled like lightning.

"Wow! Is that a car!" said Ernie. "Is that his car?"

Marie shook her head. "This car is even fancier than his. I wonder whose it could be."

As if on cue, a man and woman emerged from Montini's front door.

"He seemed somewhat reasonable at first. I'm sure you saw the smiles on his face when I mentioned annullment. But when she came down, all reason flew out the window," the man said.

"A terrible person," the woman replied. "I doubt that she speaks English. Our Leonard's mother-in-law."

"I am glad that you do not speak Italian, my dear, so you could not know what she called us."

"Darling, I have sufficient knowledge of Latin-based languages to know precisely what she called us. She, who claims to be so devout, still in her nightgown and robe instead of being dressed for church. No doubt a preview of the slovenly hypocrite Leonard's precious Philomena will become with time."

"Slovenly? The house is immaculate though there was little in it."

"But did you notice how her hair was so dirty that it clung to her head?"

"I thought it was wet from headache packs."

"We will be spared knowing. To us, Leonard is dead. We will burn a candle for him each Friday night."

"Have we any other choice, Darling?"

As the car pulled away, Marie said to her friends, "They must be Leonard's parents. They aren't any happier about Philomena than Mama and Papa are about Leonard. I don't see why. Leonard and Philomena are so perfect together."

March Omens

Carla Taylor

The geese are flying over.
And I wonder what it means.
Besides the obvious.

Are these checkmarks in the sky
marking my mistakes,
reminding me "You can't fly?"

Or do these formations signal that
I've won? That we have the
Victory?

Maybe the god of the geese
is just giving me his
"High Five."

It's hard to say.

The Trick is This

Steve Cutter

The trick is this:
To capture,
yet not constrict;
To know,
yet not pry;
To desire,
yet not obsess;
To show myself,
yet not lie.

So given such constraints,
it's difficult to learn
the pathway to your heart.
Should the road be followed
ever so slow and sure;
or raced on from the start?

The slow path may be the best;
'tis even, straight and smooth,
and obstacles are few.
But a measured pace could
turn your desire to dust,
which by breeze is blown askew.

And what of a pell-mell
rush toward your good grace?
The risk seems truly great
that such a tack will build
a wall in you and doom
this quest to unkind fate.

Again, the trick is this:
To tell you of your sparkle,
yet not lose the light;
To touch your life with mine dear,
yet not cool desire;
To describe my dreams to you,
yet not grow apart;
And to speak these truths out loud,
yet not squelch your fire.

The Voice of the Dragon

John Stobart

"I've seen the elephant,"
Spoke a mountain man.
"My stars!" a listener exclaims.
"And then the lightning spoke,"
Proclaims another,
Perhaps in the Year of the Turtle,
Maybe in the Moon of Spotted Tigers,
Or Albino Zebras.

In the seasons of the sun
Bereft or not
Of Joy and fun,
Come the sorrows.
"The centaur is a mythological beast,"
Ends one story tainted with wit
But the "teeth-tiered sharks" run amok
Below it all.
And by the sign of Cancer's crab
Millions fall
Leaving a chorus of weeping women by the wall
And legionnaires trembling in a hall.
There's an eternal doorman
Guarding the turnstyles of life
Perhaps to enter is to rot
Optimism: maybe not.
Dress it in shadows with gargoyle glee
Shape it Protean
Or Hydra-headed
Tang it
Bang it in armor aging green--
Life's nicest monsters
Are dreamed not seen
But when the dragon speaks,
I listen
With my spine
And quake
In my liver
And rattle my stones
Sentiment but insensible
Too groveling for groans.
I listen
But can only hear
The ticking down
Inside my bones.

Hurt

Janine Passehl

We sat across from each other, an aura of contentment surrounding us, as Vivaldi's The Four Seasons drifted smoothly through the yard. He talked all the while in a calm, even voice, offering, perhaps unconsciously, a verbal illustration of the concertos. And I sat rapt and secretly studied his slight movements and carefully dissected each word he uttered.

I let the balmy sound of his voice caress me as I closed my eyes and envisioned the two of us lying in the grass on a late spring evening, surrounded by the scent of blooming flowers and the merriment of discovering a new and exciting friendship. "It's always most difficult in the beginning, I suppose." His suddenly trembling voice, childlike, interrupted my reverie. I looked across the patio table at him questioningly. "To be secure enough in your own self and to open up honestly to someone else. I just feel so alone sometimes. I might be surrounded by people, but it seems as if nobody knows who I am."

I understood what he meant only too well, because I had felt that way myself many times before - disguising my true thoughts and emotions, conforming to society's beliefs about who I should be.

His thoughts must have been mirroring my own, and as the music became more fervent, so did he. His voice, while remaining quite calm, had become considerably louder, and his words had become rather heated. I looked into his eyes and saw a solemn intensity deep within and could also see that his lips had begun to quiver slightly as he spoke. "The thing that upsets me mosts is that people don't even try to understand me. They make no effort at all. Only you."

How anyone could not want to get to know such an intelligent and spiritual person truly amazed me. He leaned his head back and looked up at the dark, starry night sky. "The darkness comforts me," he said in a soft voice. He explained no further, only continued to look skyward. And I asked no questions, didn't really need to. In the brightness of day you seem more vulnerable - it's easier to hide in the shadows, I supposed.

It seemed as though for weeks he had been unable to let me in, to allow himself to be totally honest. He trusted me - of that I was sure. Yet he still held back. What was he afraid of, I wondered? But bit by bit the pieces were falling away, and I was confident that one day soon he would bare himself and reveal to me his secret hopes and fears.

"It hurts to love," he had said before. He often made such simple statements that seemed to encompass so much feeling. I wasn't sure what he meant but was afraid to ask, maybe fearful of the answer.

I shivered - from the cold? Or from the harsh realization that although this beautiful man had allowed me to glimpse some sacred part of himself, there was at least one part of myself I could never allow him to see...and it hurt.

Vis Major (a villanelle)

Ted Thompson

Despite the fearsome force and bale you brave,
You'll never win the fair eternal prize--
It matters not, for all you shout and rave.

For moral calm and ease is what you crave,
But world will never let you be so wise,
Despite the fearsome force and bale you brave.

The monarch and the charlatan and knave
With lust and greed will conquer all your tries,
It matters not, for all you shout and rave.

You can't withstand the urge that nature gave.
Your peace of mind is ravaged by her eyes,
Despite the fearsome force and bale you brave.

Your best resolve melts down in hot wind's wave
Of silken dress--betraying silken thighs.
It matters not, for all you shout and rave.

And so it goes until you reach the grave;
Your human self is where the problem lies,
Despite the fearsome force and bale you brave.
It matters not, for all you shout and rave.

(Vis Major - "law An overwhelming force of nature having unavoidable consequences that under certain circumstances can exempt one from the obligations of a contract."
"so it goes" - see Kurt Vonnegut)

George's Dilemma
Pat Walsh

"What is it, dear? Is something wrong with the wine?"

"No, Martha, the wine is excellent."

"Then what is it, George? Something is troubling you."

\ "Well, Martha, I'm a little reluctant to talk about it. I feel like such a fool."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to pry."

"No, dear, it's all right. It's just that I'm so ashamed."

"Oh, George! It can't be as bad as all that. Tell me about it, and I'll try to help."

"Well, all right. You do have a way of alleviating my guilt whenever I make a blunder like this. You know Hans Schmidt, the blacksmith?" George said.

"Oh, yes! That huge fellow with the enormous arms."

"Yes, that's him," George said. "Well, a few months ago, I went to see Mr. Schmidt on business. After we had finished discussing the reason for my visit, he began to talk about dress codes in our society. He was extremely concerned. It was his opinion that people should be able to dress as they please without being ridiculed for it. He said sleeves bothered him the most because they restricted his freedom of movement and that he would like to wear sleeveless garments, whenever weather permitted, without people thinking he was an eccentric person. He felt that if his idea were written into law, he would be less inhibited."

"Why doesn't he just roll up his sleeves? I don't think anyone would mind," Martha said.

"No, his heart is set on sleeveless shirts," George said. "Well, naturally, I didn't take this matter seriously," George continued. "In fact, I considered his sensitivity rather amusing. Nonetheless, I told him I would see what I could do. About a month later, as you know, Congress began drafting the Constitution. Well, the members were bogged down a bit. I'd had several glasses of grog with dinner, and I was feeling quite good, so I decided to interject a little humor into the proceedings. I made a short speech explaining that Mr. Schmidt had very large arms and that there were certain restrictions preventing him from baring them and that he would like a law passed giving him the right to curtail those restrictions. I didn't mention shirts because even though I was trying to be humorous, I felt I should be true to Mr. Schmidt's wishes and use a broader term that would cover anything he might wear around his arms and shoulders. I closed my speech by stating, as Mr. Schmidt told me: `I fought in the Continental Army which makes me a citizen of the United States, and I think I should have the right to bare arms.' To my surprise, instead of laughter, I received a standing ovation."

"Then what is the problem?" Martha said.

"The problem," George said, "is that Congress misunderstood what I was talking about, which was my fault, and the word bare, spelled b-a-r-e was misinterpreted by Congress as b-e-a-r, so they worked it in with the defense program and Mr. Schmidt's dream of a law that would give him the right to bare arms now reads as the Second Amendment to the Constitution thus:

The Right to Bear Arms

A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

"It was too late to change it the minute Congress adopted the idea. If the truth got out, the United States would be the laughing stock of the entire world at a time when we have a great need to be respected. Can't you see what a disaster this can become, Martha? The chaos, the violence, the murders could be like a plague. I blame myself, Martha, and that blasted grog. I never did have much of a tolerance for it."

"Oh, George! Don't be so hard on yourself. The American people are not stupid. Anyone with any sense at all knows that people, especially ill-tempered people, cannot be allowed to walk around carrying guns. I'm sure your apprehensions are unfounded. Have another glass of wine, dear, and try to put it out of your mind."

"I suppose you are right," George said after a long silence. "The law clearly states that arms are to be kept for use in the militia in the defense of our country. Still, I have the uneasy feeling that the amendment may be understood, perhaps by future generations. Anyway, I just hope Mr. Schmidt will understand."

Emergency Call Box

LaDonna Hite

"Oh , my God! Somebody please help me! I'm bleeding to death! Help me, somebody, please! I'm going to die! Where am I? What is this that I'm touching, some kind of button?"

"This is the Emergency call box. What is your emergency?"

"I'm bleeding to death, and I can't see anything! I don't know what's happening to me."

"What is your name?"

"My first name is Better, and my last name is Good."

"Ms. Good, what is your middle initial?"

"It's B."

"One moment, please, while I check your life file. This will determine who your doctor will be."

"Please hurry! I need help! Excuse me! Hello, operator? Operator!"

"Yes, Ms. Better B. Good."

"Uh, where am I?"

"Our location box tells us you're in the waiting room."

"Well, why does it smell so damp and moldy? How come I don't hear anyone else here with me? What the hell is going on?"

"One moment, Ms. Good, your file has just been pulled up. Okay, it seems that you had numerous fights in the first ten years of your life, and you were given forty-three stitches in that time period. Uh, quite unique - it shows here that you also were in some kind of car accident. You hit a three year old boy that was also killed in which you told the police that the boy ran in front of the car as you pulled in the drive. OH MY! That three year old was your son! My goodness! At age twenty-nine, you were in a robbery in which you stole thousands of dollars. And now you're thirty years old. Is this correct?"

"Yes! What in the hell kind of emergency service is this? Damn it! I need some help! I'm dying!"

"Calm down, Ms. Better B. Good. Your old doctor, Dr. You Missed The Trip To Heaven, has cancelled you as a patient of his, and we're waiting on a new doctor."

"Hell, did you hear me? I need emergency care!"

"Ms. Good, please calm down. We just got ahold of your new doctor. He's on his way up to get you."

"What is his name?"

"Well, if you must know before he gets there, his name is Dr. You're On Your Way To Hell."

(so if there are any Better B. Good's out there, make sure you have an emergency service before you push that button)

Johnny

Bill Yarrow

You're sitting in a darkened theatre
with Gothic ceilings and one exit
watching the latest film with William
Bendix and Veronica Lake. Next to you
eating popcorn is a woman from Romania
named Anna. She is smiling, but at all
the wrong scenes. You put your arm around
her and smile yourself. Yesterday's
plastic surgery has been a complete
success and the fingertip skin grafts
feel the best they ever have. Bendix,
a narrative madness in his eyes, is
suffering from a war wound. He holds
both sides of his head and bellows,
"Turn off that monkey music!"
The movie's good but you don't like
being in the dark. You motion to Anna
to go, just a shade brutally perhaps,
and drag her down the aisle. In the lobby,
empty but for the concessionaire, she says
wait, she has to relieve herself. Hurry
it up you mutter and pass the time
staring at your face in the mirrored walls.
It's not your face and that suits you fine.
Where the hell is she? At that moment she
returns. What took you? you rasp and begin
walking. Hey, wait, she calls, running to
your side. She's holding your arm, pressed
up against you as you push open the glass
door and walk out. Something smells funny
in the night.Then she's pleading for
ice cream but you say no, shut up. You
turn the corner at LaSalle and look to
your side. She's no longer there. No one is.
Then twenty headlights flash, guns so up,
the police bullets scream into your neck.
You fall to the ground, writhing, crying,
pouring out blood. Lifting your head from
the pavement two inches toward the sky you
hiss the name of the woman who betrayed you
to the authorities, Aaaaaaannnnnaaaaa!
now deep in the shadows, contorted with
peculiar joy, anxious - eager for tomorrow,
impatient for America to happen to her.
But it won't. They lied. She's going back
to Romania. Another darkened theatre.

Credo #6 or #9

John Stobart

As cobalt lasers leech the bones to dawn:
Revolting worlds evolve and worm to life;
Earth's squirming birth affirms old Ether's spawn,
In viscose sea's amino-acid strife:
Being becomes finite in tomb and race;
An oozing harmony, the perfect hitch,
A fossil making Plato's hide-in-face:
Reflection--COMIC ZEUS IN COSMIC ITCH!

How tempting now to crush this verse too thin:
My muse's mimic gold, not lyric blame,
Detect this surplus-woe as wisdom-skin;
Its body all silicone-will-for-fame:
This sonnet's double-helix, spittle-spite--
Dancing Gammas bent on dawn's internal night.

Vicious Circle

Steve Cutter

A vicious circle,
Such that its end spurs its obscene start,
Has rolled its fat and bloated form
Well past those of weakened heart
And has become the masses' norm.

And, in doing so,
The deathless beast has cracked, split and rent
An unshakable foundation,
Which in decades past had lent
Stability to a once proud nation.

Look, and you will see
Sireless waifs in rags and squalor,
Desperate maidens, empty and shallow,
And pained youths with misplaced valor:
Hooded, tied, and facing gallows.

Still the culprit smiles
And grows fatter with each turn.
The snare is sprung, and set, then sprung -
It seems we cannot learn;
And those that pay most dear are young.

In the Beginning

Ted Thompson

You probably think "bread"
Includes fax machines
And Cadillacs
And third row tickets
To all the Bulls
Playoff games.
Give us this day our...
Give us this day our...

And when your contract
Reads, permissively,
"May be granted"
You assume the imperative
"Will"
And threaten to sue when
It doesn't happen.

And when the poet
Says "medicine"
You guess he means
Abortion
Or auto grease
Or any other damn thing
As though obscurity
Were the ultimate goal
Of the poet game,
As though the words
Were ink blot personality tests,
As though the poet were
Incapable
Of saying what he means.

So why do you
Look here
For a poem?
Go write your own
Frigging poem
(You will anyway)
Only keep your
Destructionist
Plagiarizing
Multiplicity-of-texts
Anything-means-
Anything-because-I-say-so
Hands off MINE!

WORDEATER 88 STUDENT JURY
Keleigh Biggins
Joel Kramer
Sharon Krumpock
Mary Frances Lund
Andrea Rock
Andrea Schroll
Carla Taylor

John Stobart, Academic Advisor
Mary Frances Lund, Editor
Scott Olsen, Technical Advisor

For a selection to be printed in this issue, four of the above students had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

AWARDS

POETRY $5.00 each
Angela Brooks
Joseph Burza
Dojna Corzine
Steve Cutter
Janine Passehl
Lorraine Johnson

PROSE $5.00 each
Keleigh Biggins
Joseph Chellino
Crista Fabrycki
Mike Oliveri
Margo Winder

COVER $10.00
Michael Fletcher

SUBMISSION DEADLINES
Manuscripts and cover designs must be submitted to:

John Stobart, room C1069,
by:
Sept. 30, 1994 - Wordeater 89
Nov. 15, 1994 - Wordeater 90

Manuscripts should be typed and will not be returned.

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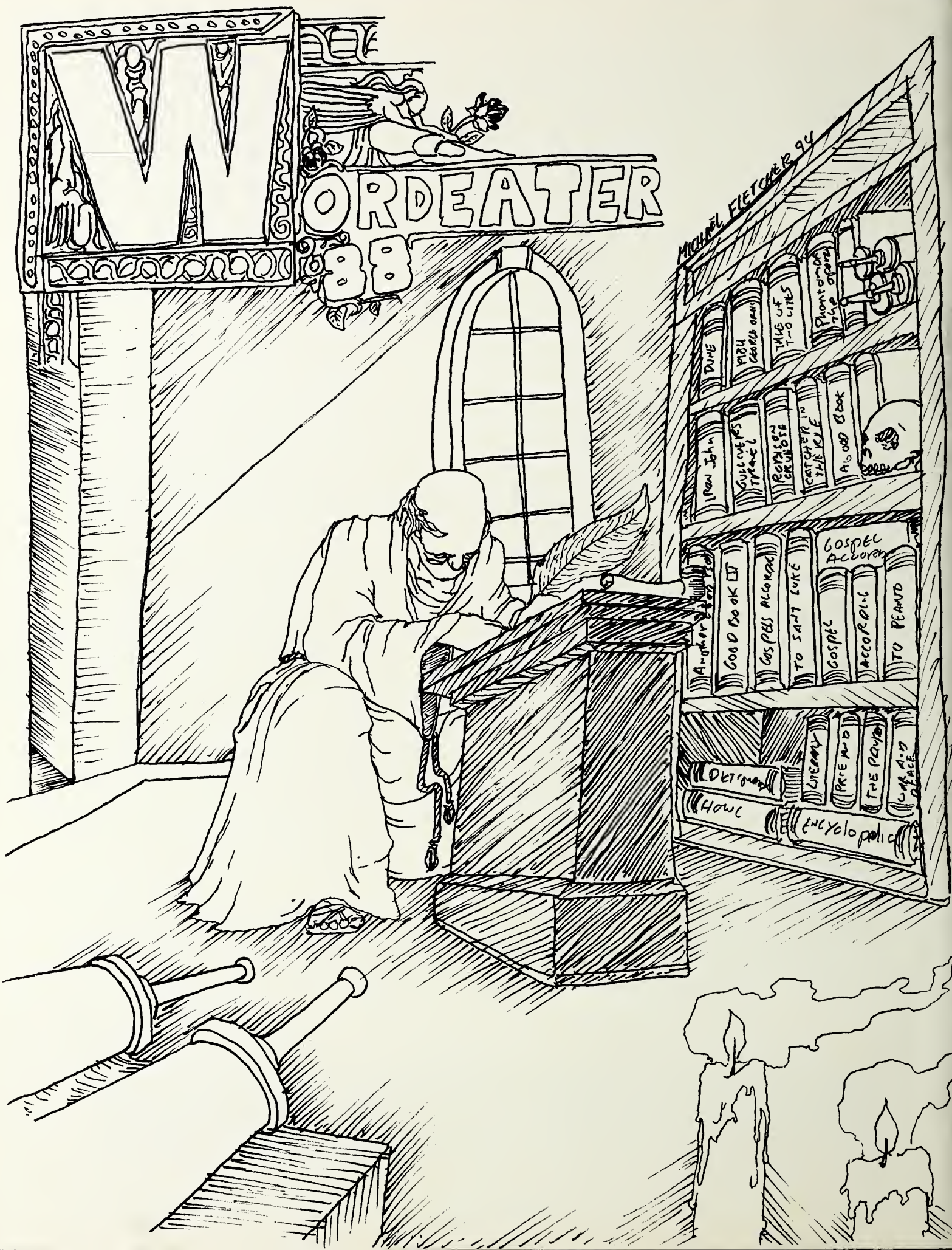
This issue contains selections from students, faculty and friends of Joliet Junior College. Only current students, however, are eligible for awards.


WORDEATER
88
MICHAEL FLETCHER 94
DUNE
THE OF TWO CITIES
IRON JOHN
GULLIVERS TRAVEL
ROBINSON CRUSOE
CATCHER IN THE RYE
AGOOD BOOK
GOSPEL ACCORD
GOOD BOOK
GOSPELS ACCORDING
TO SANT LUKE
GOSPEL
ACCORDING
TO PEANUT
HOWL
ENCYCLOPEDIA